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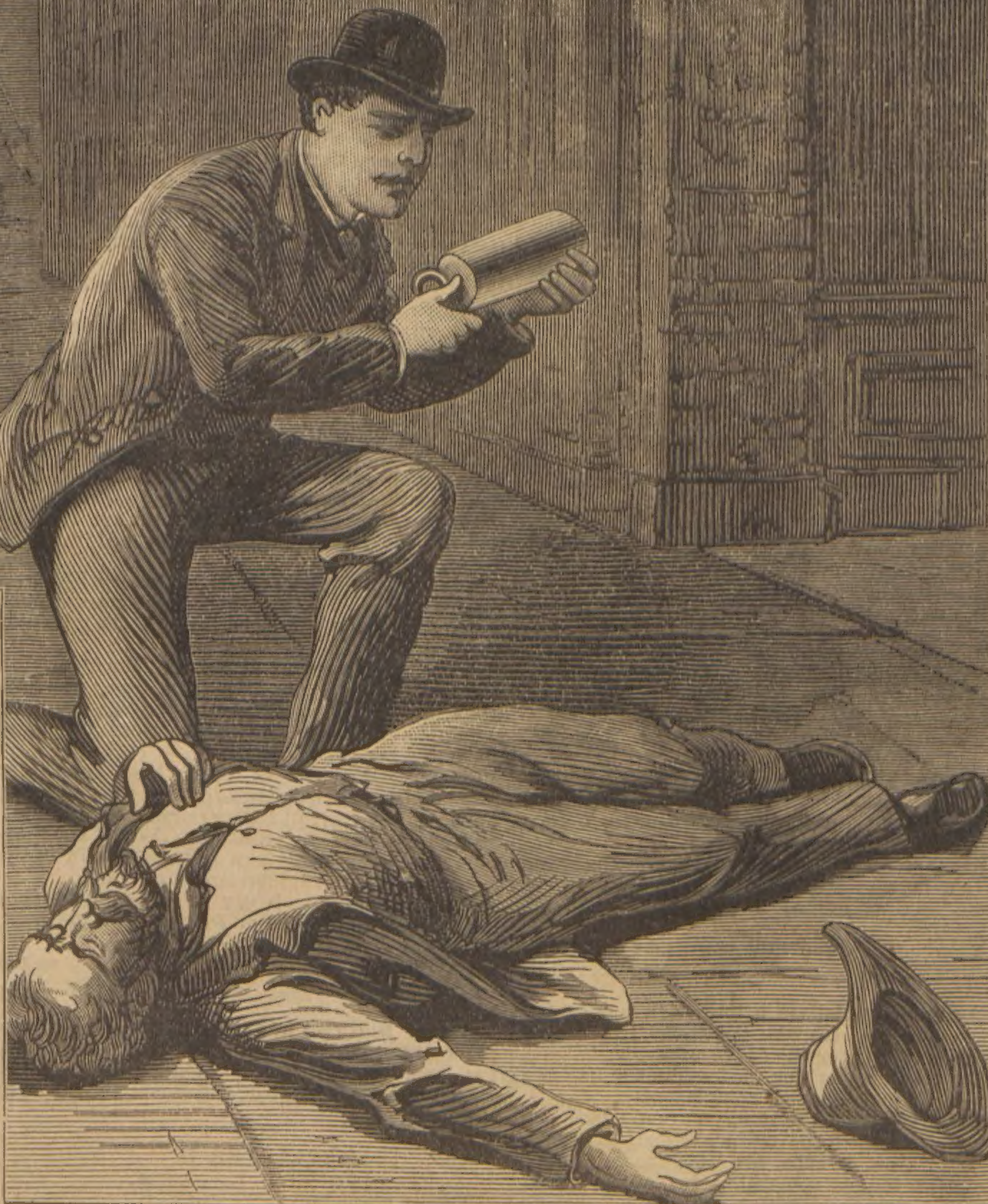
JOE PHENIX' MASTER SEARCH

OR,
The Casket of Ill Omen.
A Romance of City and Camp.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
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"THE FRESH OF 'FRISCO," THE "DICK
TALBOT" STORIES. "ACTOR
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE ASSAULT.

THE hands of the clocks of the metropolis were pointing to the hour of eleven.
It was a pleasant night in early May, but the uptown cross street to which we introduce the reader was almost deserted, although it was in the tenement quarter.
It was a narrow street and the tenement-houses rose on both sides like the grim canyon's walls, although a light here and there shone from a window.
Through the street came two men; roughly dressed fellows with their coat-collars turned up



"CAN IT BE POSSIBLE THAT THE FELLOWS WERE AFTER THIS CASSET RATHER THAN THE MAN?" CRIED PHENIX.

and their soft-slouch hats pulled down over their eyes.

A prudent man happening to meet the pair in a dark street, on a dark night, would undoubtedly have given them a wide berth.

The two were looking at the numbers of the houses as they came along.

"Here is 904," said the taller of the two, a well-built fellow, who had a gentlemanly bearing, despite the roughness of his dress.

"Yes, I reckoned that it would be about the middle of the block," observed the other who was a short, thick-set fellow, with a full, dark beard.

"You are certain that you have not made any mistake about the matter?" the first man asked.

"Nary a mistake!" exclaimed the bearded fellow in a most positive manner. "I have followed the game clear from the camp up on the divide.

"I played the spy on the boss and heered how it was all arranged for the man to come to New York, bringing this box with him, but I couldn't make out who he was to see in New York or where the party lived, for his instructions were written down, and nothing was said about them."

"Ah, yes, I see; that made the task of obtaining information a difficult one."

"Indeed it was, and though I tracked the fellow like a bloodhound from the time he left the camp until he arrived in New York, I was not able to obtain any information in time to write you."

"I noticed that part in the letters in which from time to time you report progress; but I supposed that it was because you hesitated to trust the information to the letters, for fear some of them might miscarry and so put someone else up to the time of day."

"No, I hadn't any fear of that," the bearded fellow replied, "for I would have written in such a guarded manner that, although you would have understood what I was driving at, no stranger into whose hands the letter might fall would be able to make head or tail of it."

"Well, I certainly thought it strange, but then, as I had perfect confidence that you would work the trick for all it was worth, I did not give myself any uneasiness about the matter."

"Well, sir, you never saw a man who looked after himself better than this fellow did all the way from the camp, clear to New York, and it wasn't until the last minute, just as we were running into the city, that an accident put me in possession of the information which I have tried so hard to gain."

"That is frequently the case in this world," the tall fellow observed with the air of a philosopher. "Man strives, plots and contrives, all to no purpose, and then at the last moment, just as he is about to give up the matter in disgust, an accident gives him a victory."

"Well, it was just so in this case," the bearded fellow remarked, "and I will tell you how it was."

"I occupied the seat right behind him, keeping as close a watch upon my man's movements as ever a cat did on a rat, when he abruptly drew from his pocket the paper upon which the address was written. I suppose that he wanted to be sure that he hadn't forgotten it. And as he read the address I looked right over his shoulder, as wise as could be, and read it too."

"That was a keen trick!" the other exclaimed approvingly.

"You can bet high on that, and it came so easy too; no trouble about the matter, and yet all the way from the camp I had been scheming and fussing and fretting, about how I could work the game."

"And he gave it right into your hands without any trouble?"

"You bet he did!" the bearded fellow exclaimed, emphatically. "And I was as tickled over the thing as though I had struck a big streak of pay dirt!"

"Well, if we can only work the game in the right way we will strike the biggest thing which has ever been hit in the West."

"You are right there for a thousand ducats!"

"Well, sir, the man held up the paper and I read the directions with nary bit of trouble, 'Violet Grahame,' and the number was 904, just as I told you."

"This is the house, and poor quarters enough it is too," the tall fellow observed, as he looked up at the front of the dingy tenement-house before which they were standing.

"Right you are! It don't look like the home of a heiress who will be able to clean up for a million or so of dollars if everything pans out all right."

"Yes, but I reckon that you and I will take that trouble off her mind," the other observed in a grim way.

"A million of dollars is too much money for one woman to have," he continued. "And so we will look out for the cash for her."

"Things are working just right for us," the bearded fellow observed, complacently.

"I sent you a telegram so you could meet me at the depot when the train arrived, and then our man took it into his head to go into a restaurant to get something to eat, and that gave us a chance to get on the ground before him."

"Yes, and we are not the ones I think we are if we don't manage to improve the opportunity."

"Lay him out with a brick on the head then make off with the box," the other replied with grim determination.

"I reckon that will work," the bearded fellow observed, approvingly. "What are you going to use for a weapon—a club?" and the speaker surveyed the tall fellow as though he was calculating as to whether he had such a thing concealed about his person.

"I have borrowed an idea from these New York thugs," the other replied, and as he spoke he produced an article from under his coat which looked more like a large sausage than aught else, being about fifteen, or eighteen inches long and an inch and a half in diameter.

The bearded fellow surveyed the article with a deal of curiosity.

"What do you call that, anyway?" he asked.

"It is a piece of lead pipe done up in a cloth, and after a man gets a lick over the head with an instrument of this kind he is not apt to take much interest in what is going on around him."

"No, I should say not. Jerusalem! that is about as fine a thing to lay a man out with as I ever heered of!" the bearded fellow declared.

"It is a mighty effective weapon," was the reply. "As I said, these city thugs use it frequently when they want to lay a man out quietly so that he will not be able to give an alarm after he gets the blow. One good clip on the head will settle a man unless he has a skull like an ox!"

"Hush! there's some one coming down the street!" the bearded fellow cried in a cautious tone.

"The odds are big that it is our man!"

"The door is open and the entry is dark," the bearded fellow remarked as he peered in the entrance to the tenement-house. "S'pose we lay for him inside the entry. There will be light enough from the street for us to see him when he comes in and we can get a fine chance to lay him out, and if we do the job in the entry even if some one comes along the street they would not get on to our work."

"That is true!"

It was as the bearded fellow had said; the tenement-house door stood open; it was seldom closed, and never locked, either by day or night.

There was no light within, and a better lurking place for men bent upon committing such an outrage as the two had in view could hardly have been found in all the big city.

The pair hastened to gain the gloom of the entry, for the sound of the footsteps approaching up the street came distinctly to their ears.

Some ten feet from the door the stairs started, and the two groped their way through the darkness until they came to the staircase and by its side they crouched like a couple of wild beasts in ambush waiting for their prey.

The simile is a correct one, for this precious pair were very tigers at heart.

The sound of the footsteps grew more and more distinct.

"I will lay him out," the tall fellow said in a hoarse whisper. "And the moment he falls you go through him."

"All right! You can bet that I will work the game right up to the handle!"

Where the two men crouched the darkness was intense, but, as they had anticipated, enough light came from the street to enable them to plainly distinguish the form of any one entering by the door.

The pair did not have long to wait.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer; and, then a man halted in the doorway, he was evidently examining the number of the house.

Having apparently satisfied himself that he was in the right place he advanced into the entry.

"There's a light in the second story windows so I will be able to inquire there," the stranger murmured as he advanced through the gloom of the hall-way.

Some six feet he advanced, and the crouching ruffian, with the piece of lead pipe, was just about to spring upon him when the stranger made the discovery that there were others in the entry besides himself.

He uttered a cry of alarm and turned to flee. With the quickness of the tiger leaping upon its prey the tall fellow pursued the stranger and just as the man gained the door of the tenement-house he dealt him a terrific blow in the head with the novel instrument of war.

The man thus violently assaulted uttered a loud groan and pitched forward on his face, sprawling upon the pavement.

"Quick, the box!" cried the tall fellow as the pair hastened through the door after their victim.

But as the two advanced to the side of the prostrate man the sharp, quick bark of a revolver broke the stillness of the night and a bullet whistled through the air, right over the heads of the two.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE RESCUE.

NEVER were men more startled.

For a second they glanced around.

Down the street, plainly visible in the glare of a gas lamp, was the stalwart figure of a powerful, and evidently resolute man.

Coming along, in a leisurely manner, up the street the new-comer had arrived on the scene of action just in time to see the assaulted stranger stagger forth from the tenement; his groan and the two dark forms following in pursuit had given warning that a tragedy was taking place.

The new-comer was too far off to hope to interfere in time to prevent the men from continuing the attack, but as he was prompt in action, and fertile in expedients, he immediately whipped out his revolver and opened fire, although he was not near enough to do any material damage.

For a moment the pair hesitated and both produced revolvers.

It was in their minds to offer battle to the new-comer, so reluctant were they to abandon their prey, but as they hesitated, clear and distinctly to their ears came the alarm raps of a policeman roused to vigilance by the sound of the revolver-shot.

"We must be off or we will be caught in a trap, curse the luck!" cried the tall fellow.

"Blame me if this ain't the toughest thing that I have struck in a dog's age!" exclaimed the other.

And then the two took to their heels and ran down the street in the opposite direction from that in which the man with the revolver was coming.

The new-comer had broken into a run after firing the shot.

Although the odds were two to one he did not seem to hesitate to advance to the attack, and when the assailants took to their heels he was prompt to follow in pursuit, firing another shot as an evidence that he meant business.

The alarm raps of the policemen now began to ring out sharply, and it was plain that the guardians of the night were well alarmed.

The two fugitives ran like deers.

They were on the last block of the street; beyond was the river; ten houses down, the dwellings ended, a lumber yard and foundry finishing out the block; back of the lumber yard was a stone yard, which ran through into the next block.

Into the lumber yard the fugitives ran and when the man with the revolver reached the spot where the ruffians had quitted the street, no sign could be either seen or heard of them.

"The chase is up!" he exclaimed as he came to a halt and listened for a moment, trying to detect which way the fugitives had gone.

"A man might almost as well hunt for a needle in a bundle of hay as to attempt to find a couple of these New York toughs in a place of this kind."

Just then two policemen came running up.

Coming from opposite directions along the water front they had met at the foot of the street and ascended it in company.

"What is the matter?" cried the foremost policeman as he reached the side of the stranger, looking suspiciously at the revolver in his hands as he spoke.

"A couple of ruffians assaulted a man up the street; they were evidently lying in wait for someone in a doorway, and when this party entered they jumped on him. He staggered out into the street, and as they were about to go through him I came up, just in time to drive them off with a revolver-shot, as I was too far away to hope to get up in time to interfere."

While the gentleman—who was a tall, finely built man, whose figure showed great muscular power, and his stern, lion-like face betrayed him to be possessed of uncommon resolutions—was making this explanation, the second policeman had been looking earnestly at him.

"If I ain't mistaken, this is Mr. Phenix," he said, in a very respectful way.

"That is my name, and now that I take a good look at you it strikes me that I have seen you before."

"Oh, yes, I was with you about ten years ago, when you nailed a gang of Italian counterfeiters in Baxter Street. This is Mr. Joe Phenix, Jim," he explained to his brother officer, "the detective. Maybe you have heard of him, although he is not on the force now."

"Oh, yes, you are the man who got the English crook in the Englehart case!" exclaimed the other policeman, surveying the great detective with evident admiration.

"Ah, yes, I thought I had seen you before. Your name is MacGowan," Joe Phenix remarked. "I have a pretty good memory for names and faces, but ten years is a long time for a man to remember, and I do not think I have met you since we nabbed the Italians."

"That is so."

"Well, Mr. Phenix, I'm thinking that we will not stand much chance of catching the men who did this job," the policeman observed. "There is a foundry next door and a stoneyard in the rear of this lumber lot, and these toughs who live around here know the ins and outs of the yards as well as we do our own houses. It is not the first time that some of these young scamps who belong to the gang which hangs out 'round here, has give us the slip by taking refuge in these yards."

"From what I could see of these two I should judge them to be men and not boys," the detective remarked.

"Some of the gang are twenty-five and thirty years old, but the most of them are only kids," the policeman replied.

"Well, you might see what you can do in regard to hunting these fellows up, but they have got such a start now that it is big odds against their being caught.

"And while you search the lumber yard I will take a look at the victim," the detective observed.

"I should judge from the way he went down that he got an ugly hit on the head, still I guess he is not badly hurt, for a blow of that kind rarely lays a man out for good, although sometimes the skull is fractured."

"We'll do the best we can, but the chances are that the men have got out of reach by this time."

Then the two officers entered the lumber yard while Joe Phenix returned to the prostrate man.

He had fallen upon his face and was lying in exactly the same position which he had occupied when Joe Phenix had passed him in his race after the assailants.

The detective knelt by the side of the victim, and his first impression was that he was dead, but an examination showed that his heart was still beating, although but faintly.

"The man must have got an awful whack!" the detective exclaimed.

It was a dark spot where the victim lay, so Joe Phenix lit a match in order to see just how badly the man was hurt.

The victim was well in years, with iron-gray hair, worn long after the Western fashion and a short, bushy beard of the same hue.

He was dressed in a plain, dark suit, and looked like a drover or farmer, for his hands were large and rough, and his skin tanned by exposure to the weather.

His head was covered by a broad-brimmed soft hat, one of the kind so much affected by Westerners.

"From the fashion of his dress I should imagine that he is from the West," the detective observed.

Blood was trickling from under the crown of the hat and Joe Phenix shook his head.

"This is a case for a surgeon!" he declared.

"I am afraid that the man is badly hurt."

Then the detective noticed that there was a strange-looking lump on the man's back in the neighborhood of the waist, and upon placing his hand upon it, his curiosity being excited, found that it was a hard substance.

"What is it, I wonder?"

He lifted up the skirt of the victim's, coat and lit another match so as to have light for the examination.

Belted to the man's waist was about the oddest-looking article that the detective had ever seen in all his varied experience.

It was a cylinder, about the shape of a minie bullet, but pointed at both ends, composed of some dark reddish colored metal, more strongly resembling copper than anything else.

It was about eight inches long and three or four inches in diameter. At the ends were wings into which the snaps of the belt hooked.

"Well, this beats my time, I must say!" the detective remarked, as he sounded on the metal box, or casket, for such it evidently was, with his knuckles.

"This man is plainly from the West, a miner possibly, and the chances are great that this box contains valuables," Phenix mused.

"Lucky for my friend, here, that I arrived as I did, for if I had come upon the scene five minutes later the crooks would undoubtedly have got away with the prize."

"By Jove!"

A sudden idea had come to the detective.

"Can it be possible that the fellows were after this casket rather than the man?" cried Phenix.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERY.

THE approach of the policemen interrupted the meditations of the detective.

"The fellows were too smart for us," policeman McGowan remarked. "There is a lumber yard down the street and after they got into it the jig was up."

"The man is badly hurt and the quicker he is got to the hospital the better it will be for him," the detective observed. "So if you will send a call for the ambulance I will remain with him until it comes."

"All right! We will attend to the matter," the policeman replied, and then they departed.

It was a good half-hour before the ambulance arrived, and during that time the assailed man remained insensible; in fact he showed such little signs of life that Joe Phenix rather inclined to the opinion that the man would die before the ambulance came.

At last the wagon came rattling down the street at the breakneck speed peculiar to such vehicles.

The young doctor in charge of the ambulance proved to be an old acquaintance of the detec-

tive and he greeted Joe Phenix warmly when he recognized him.

The detective explained what had happened, and the doctor made a hasty examination of the wounded man, for Joe Phenix had expressed his fear that the ruffians had killed the victim.

"He is alive, and will probably pull through," the doctor answered. "From the looks of his head I should judge that he had a good, strong skull, and though he has evidently got an awful lick, yet the wound is not a mortal one in my judgment."

"I should imagine that the man who attacked him used a sand-club," the doctor continued, "or some weapon of that kind."

"It is very likely, for nine out of ten of these night prowlers use sand-clubs now."

And then the detective called the doctor's attention to the peculiar copper box.

"Well, it is rather odd," the doctor remarked.

"Yes, and there is no apparent way of opening it."

"That is so!" exclaimed the other, after making a careful examination of the box. "It is a regular puzzle!"

"I confess that it excites my curiosity, for in all my experience I have never come across anything of the kind before."

"Suppose you come along to the hospital, where you will have a chance to examine the matter thoroughly," the young doctor suggested.

"Well, that isn't a bad idea," the detective replied. "I certainly am interested in the case, so I will go with you."

The wounded man was placed in the ambulance, Joe Phenix took a seat in the rear of the vehicle, and away they went for the hospital.

It did not take the pair of spirited steeds attached to the vehicle long to cover the distance, and soon the senseless man was deposited on a cot in the main ward of the institution which the metropolis kindly provides for the accommodation of the helpless strangers within its gates.

As it happened the head doctor of the hospital was in the building when the ambulance arrived, having been detained by an urgent case which required his personal attention.

Dr. Macdonald, as the chief was called, had a high regard for the veteran detective, and when he learned the particulars of the case, expressed the opinion that it was well that Joe Phenix had come with the wounded man.

The outer garments of the patient had been removed, carefully searched, and a list taken of all the articles found, the usual procedure in such cases.

The list was not a long one.

The stranger had no jewelry; his money was contained in a small buckskin bag, such as is commonly carried by the miners in the gold districts of the far West, a fact which caused Joe Phenix to remark:

"This buckskin bag confirms the suspicion which I had that this man was from the West, and, probably, a miner."

"His appearance seems to indicate that he is something of the kind," the doctor observed. In the bag was a good sum of money, a little over fifty dollars, which caused the doctor to remark:

"The rascals would have succeeded in securing quite a stake if your arrival had not driven them off."

Besides the buckskin bag all that the man had in his pockets was a bandanna handkerchief and a slip of paper with an address written upon it.

"Miss Violet Grahame, 904 Thirteenth street," said the doctor as he unfolded the paper and read the words written thereon.

Joe Phenix took out his memorandum-book and made a note of the address.

"By calling upon Miss Grahame I shall, probably, be able to find out all about this man," the detective remarked. "I should judge that it was in front of this particular house that the assault was committed."

The copper box proved to be as great a mystery, even in the hospital where there was ample light for the examination, as it had been in the obscurity of the street.

It was evidently designed to open, for that it was hollow its lightness proved, but the cover was so skillfully joined to the body of the box that all the efforts of the examiners could not get it to open.

"We will have to give this up as a bad job," the detective remarked.

He and one of the attendants had been trying to solve the mystery of the box while the two doctors attended to the wounded man.

"The fellows who committed the assault used some weapon of the sand-club order, and I am very much afraid that the skull is fractured," Dr. Macdonald answered.

"The man is in a pretty bad way beyond a doubt," the younger doctor commented.

Restoratives had been applied, but they did not seem to have any effect, and Dr. Macdonald, with a solemn shake of the head, expressed his opinion that the wounded man was booked for a speedy passage to the other world.

Hardly had the words been spoken when the patient gave a gasp and opened his eyes.

"I was a little too hasty in my conclusion, I guess," Dr. Macdonald observed.

"How do you feel, my man?" he continued. But there was no sense in the glassy orbs which stared upward into the doctor's face.

"I do not believe that he understands you, doctor," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Well, from the expression on his face I should judge that he is not in possession of his right senses," the doctor replied. "But it is possible that he will come around all right in a few moments."

"In such cases as this sometimes it takes a few minutes to get the brain in working order."

"Yes, I comprehend. The shock puts the machinery out of gear."

"Exactly! that is the idea."

Then for a good ten minutes the watchers waited, keeping their eyes attentively fixed on the face of the patient.

The wounded man did not move, but his breath came much easier and it was plain that he was better.

"How do you feel now?" Dr. Macdonald queried.

"A white dome-shaped rock; get three pines in a line with the rock; twenty paces from the third pine, at a right angle, is the spot," responded the wounded man in a strange mechanical way.

The watchers looked at each other.

The man spoke in a clear tone and in a perfectly sensible way.

"You evidently did not understand what I said," Dr. Macdonald remarked. "I asked you how you felt. You have been badly hurt."

"A white dome-shaped rock—" replied the wounded man, and then he repeated the sentence.

"The man is evidently giving instructions in regard to finding a certain spot," the detective remarked. "Either some spot where a mine is located, or where some valuable articles have been hidden."

"It is as I feared," Dr. Macdonald remarked.

"His brain is affected, the skull is probably fractured, although it does not seem as if it was."

Then by the doctor's orders the hair was removed from the spot where the blow had fallen, but although there was an awful bruise there, yet the surgeon, with all his skill, could not discover any evidence to warrant him in declaring that the skull was broken.

"It is about the oddest case that ever came under my observation!" he exclaimed.

"Whether the skull is fractured or not, there is no doubt that the man's brain is affected," the detective remarked.

"Not the slightest!" the doctor replied.

"You see that he does not seem to comprehend what I say to him at all. He understands that he is spoken to, but all he can utter in reply is this one sentence."

"Well, I have read of such a case, but I never had any personal knowledge of one," Joe Phenix remarked.

"My practice has been pretty extensive, but this is my first experience in this line," the doctor observed.

"What are the chances for his being restored to a normal state?" Joe Phenix asked.

"That is a hard matter to decide," Dr. Macdonald replied with a shake of the head.

"At present it is not possible to say just how badly the man has been hurt. The only thing that can be done at present is to apply applications to reduce the swelling, and then after that goes down, I may be able to see my way clear."

"I have taken an interest in the case, and will come in again," the detective remarked.

"Do so; in a couple of days I may be able to bring him around," the doctor said.

Joe Phenix then took his departure, fully resolved to follow up this mystery until he got to the heart of it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRL'S STORY.

As it happened, Joe Phenix had no important business on hand just at this time so he was able to devote his attention to the affair which had been brought to his notice in so strange a fashion.

The dwellers in the New York tenement-houses are early risers as a rule, and so the detective did not hesitate to make his way to Thirteenth street immediately after breakfast and he arrived at the house a little before eight o'clock.

From some children who were playing around the door he ascertained just where Miss Grahame could be found and so was enabled to proceed directly to the door of her apartment.

A tall, pretty, lady-like girl of twenty or thereabouts came in answer to his knock and when he asked for Miss Violet Grahame, responded that that was her name.

"I have come to see you on a little matter of business which I fancy may be of importance to you," the detective explained.

The girl looked surprised, but invited him to enter and hastened to provide a chair for his accommodation.

The room was small, poorly furnished, but as neat and clear as possible.

In one corner stood a sewing machine and the work upon it showed that the girl had been busy when disturbed by the knock of the unexpected visitor.

The detective proceeded at once to business.

He told the story of the assault and explained that the finding of the slip of paper bearing her name and address had impelled him to call for the purpose of finding out what she knew about the stranger.

The girl listened with evident amazement.

"I do not understand it at all!" she exclaimed. "I was not expecting any visitor and do not understand who the man can be!"

Joe Phenix gave a complete description of the stranger.

The girl shook her head.

"No, I do not know any one who answers to the description."

"The man certainly had your address and was evidently coming to see you."

"It is a mystery to me, for I am certain that I never knew such a man."

"He seemed like a stranger, and from his appearance I should judge that he was a miner from the Far West—from California, possibly."

"From California?" and there was a peculiar gleam in the eyes of the girl as she spoke.

The detective was watching her face intently, and he judged that his words had given her some sort of a clue to the stranger's identity.

"Yes, so I judged, and if that fact gives you any ideas which may help to unravel this mystery, I hope you will not hesitate to speak. I am a detective officer and have a notion that there is something more than common in this affair."

"Well, I do not really know if I can say anything to throw any light on the matter," the girl remarked, slowly. "And if I speak I shall have to confide to you some painful incidents connected with my family."

"You need not fear to trust to my discretion," Joe Phenix hastened to reply. "We detectives are like doctors and lawyers. Whatever facts we learn in the course of our business we hold sacredly confidential."

"Yes, I should suppose that such would be the case," the girl remarked.

"You may rely upon it, and therefore you need not hesitate to speak freely," Joe Phenix declared.

"It is a sad story, and I have never told it to any one, but now some instinct seems to whisper to me that it is time for me to speak."

"Do not hesitate to do so, and you can rest assured that your story will never be revealed by me."

"About twenty-two years ago, my mother, then a girl of eighteen, living in Harlem, made the acquaintance of a young man named James Grahame, and after a short courtship the two were married."

"My mother knew nothing about her husband, for he was a stranger in the country, having but recently arrived from Scotland, but he infatuated her and she wedded him against the advice of all her friends."

"Young women don't usually take advice about such a matter."

"My mother had not been married many months though before she bitterly regretted that she had not listened to the counsel of her friends."

"Her husband had said that he was in the insurance business, but she soon made the discovery that that occupation was but a cloak, for he got his money in an unlawful way and his chosen associates were all vile, bad men."

"That must have been a terrible shock indeed."

"Another discovery she made was equally terrible, and that was that her husband at certain periods of the month, always when the moon was full, was afflicted with fits of abstraction which were akin to madness."

"A terrible discovery!"

"Yes, and when such fits came on, my mother trembled for her life for she knew not what he might do."

"Poor woman! her lot was indeed a hard one," the detective remarked in a commiserating tone.

"Six months after I was born, my father came home late one night, told my mother the officers of the law were after him and that he would be obliged to seek safety in flight."

"He was going to California, he said, and when he got comfortably settled there he would send for her; but my mother plucked up courage enough to say that she would not go to California, but this answer instead of exciting his anger only provoked his scorn: and he replied that when he got ready for her to come he would bring her fast enough by getting some of his friends to steal the child—that was I, you understand—"

The detective nodded.

"His idea, as he explained it, was that when my mother discovered that her child had been taken to California she would be glad to follow."

"A crafty and cruel calculation."

"Yes, it was, indeed, and it almost drove my mother frantic, and for years she watched over me with the greatest care, hardly ever permitting me to go out of her sight."

"I do not wonder at it."

"But she never had any cause for alarm, for from the time of my father's departure up to the hour of her death, which took place some six months ago, she never heard from him or of him."

"We lived in Harlem at the time of his flight, and in order to hide herself mother came to this house and here she remained to the day of her death."

"I presume that when I mentioned California your thoughts instantly reverted to your father?" Joe Phenix remarked.

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, although it does not seem probable that his man is your father, or can come from him, yet my experience has convinced me that there is a deal of truth in the old saying that 'it is the unexpected that always happens.'"

"I do not suppose that even if this man was your father you would be able to recognize him," Joe Phenix added.

"No, sir, I do not think that I would," the girl replied, in a thoughtful way. "Although I have a photograph of him, but as it was taken twenty years ago and is badly faded it would not be apt to be of much use."

"I would like to see it if you haven't any objection," the detective remarked.

"Oh, no, certainly not!"

Then the girl rose and going to a small trunk which stood in the corner of the room produced a card picture, which she handed to Joe Phenix.

The detective examined it carefully.

It was the picture of a man of about twenty-five, a good-looking young fellow with a smoothly-shaven face and an unmistakable Scotch look.

It was the face of a man who evidently came of good people, but there was a reckless, dare-devil expression upon it which betrayed to the experienced eyes of the acute man-hunter that the owner of the face was a man of strong passions, and one who had but little command over himself.

Joe Phenix shook his head as he returned the picture to the girl.

"This is not the man who was hurt last night," he said.

"But are you able really to tell?" she asked, evidently a little doubtful.

"Oh, yes."

"It is twenty long years since that picture was taken and that would certainly make a vast difference in any one's appearance."

"I have calculated upon the changes that time would make," the detective replied.

"The face of the man who now lies helpless in the hospital is so radically different from this one in the picture that it is not possible that time could make the change."

"Your father's face is long and forms almost a complete oval, the cheek-bones are high and the forehead wide."

"The face of the injured man is as round, almost, as an apple, the forehead low and narrow, and no length of time would change a long oval face into one short and broad."

"Very true," the girl agreed.

"This is all the information you can give?"

"Yes, all!"

"I shall have to wait then until the man is able to speak to get at this mystery," the detective said, rising in token that the interview was at an end.

"If you discover aught of importance concerning me I trust you will let me know," the girl remarked as she accompanied Joe Phenix to the door.

"Oh, yes, you can depend upon that, but it may be a few days before the wounded man is able to talk."

"I understand that, and shall wait with patience."

"I will not fail to come speedily if he says anything of importance!" the detective declared as he took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

STILL ON THE TRACK.

AND now we must go back a little and follow the footsteps of the precious pair whom the opportune arrival of Joe Phenix had robbed of their prey.

After passing through the lumber yard they had taken refuge in an old shed by the water-side, a little over a block away.

"This hyer is what I call a close call!" the thick-set, bearded fellow exclaimed, as he took a seat upon the ruins of a cart in a corner and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Yes, from the sound of the policemen's clubs, rapping on the pavement, it seemed as if the officers were all around us," the other responded, as he seated himself by the side of his companion.

"We have given them the slip all right though, and I tell you it was a mighty good thing for us that the lumber yard happened to be so handy."

"Yes, if we had been compelled to keep to the

streets the odds are great that we would have run right into some policeman's arms."

"And then our cake would have been all dough!" the short fellow declared with a grin.

"That is true enough, but we have nothing to boast of for we have made a sad failure."

"Luck was ag'in' us, there's no mistake 'bout that," the other observed with the air of a philosopher.

"And things were working so nicely too!" the tall fellow declared in a regretful way. "It looked as if we could not fail to make a success out of it."

"That's many a slip between the cup and the lip," the bearded man replied. "That is an old saying, you know, and an extremely true one. It looked as if we were going to be sure winners, but when that cuss who was so handy with his revolver took a hand in the game, that wasn't anything left for us to do but to git up and dust as fast as our legs would let us."

"It is a pity to be robbed of our prize after all the pains we have taken," the tall fellow remarked in a reflective way.

"That is true enough, but I don't see how we kin help it; luck is running dead ag'in' us, and no mistake!"

The other remained silent for a few moments, evidently meditating over the matter, and at last he said:

"Well, I am not content to be beaten in this way after all the trouble we have had."

"Tis mighty unpleasant; but, pardner, how are you going to help yourself?"

"The man went down like a log and the chances are great that his skull is cracked," the tall fellow observed in a reflective way.

"I reckon you are 'bout right thar. If he ain't done for, he is so near it that thar ain't no fun in the thing."

"The alarm having been given the policemen will find him and the next move, undoubtedly, will be to lug him off to the hospital."

"I reckon that will be the ticket."

"The fellow who drove us off with the revolver-shots was not near enough to be able to identify us, and so if we encounter him we will not be liable to be recognized."

"Sure enough!"

"Our game then is to see what becomes of the man, and if he is carried to the hospital, as is likely, we must put in an appearance there in the morning and claim to be his friends."

"Ah, yes, I see! and a mighty fine scheme it is too!" the bearded fellow exclaimed rubbing his hands together in a gleeful way.

"Come on then and let us set about our work at once."

"Go ahead!"

The two left the shelter of the old shed and walked along the river front until they came to the foot of the street wherein the assault had taken place.

There they halted and looked up the street. They were too far away however to be able to distinguish whether their victim was still in the same spot where he had fallen or not.

Then an idea came to the bearded man and he said:

"Say, pardner, ain't it a little risky for us to go prowling around so near where the job was done? If we run up ag'in' any of the policemen won't they be apt to suspect that we had something to do with the matter and fire some questions at us that we may have trouble to answer?"

"Yes, that is true—there is danger of something of that kind happening," the other replied. "And it will be wise for us to keep in the background. That is what I think."

"Say!" exclaimed the bearded fellow, as a sudden idea occurred to him. "How will it do for us to sneak into the lumber yard? By this time the police must have got through searching it and we kin hide thar and so be able to see what becomes of our game."

"That is a good trick and I don't see any reason why it will not work."

And having come to this conclusion the two made their way into the lumber yard and succeeded in securing a position from which they had a view of the spot where the assault had taken place.

They could distinguish the detective keeping watch over the victim of the attack, and if they had not known that he was armed the chances were great that they would have tried by a second attack to secure the peculiarly-shaped copper box which they were so anxious to get into their possession.

The pair witnessed the arrival of the ambulance and saw it depart; then, when all was quiet, they came forth from their hiding-place.

"How will we be able to find out where he has been taken?" the bearded man asked, as the pair proceeded up the street.

"The morning newspapers will probably contain an account of the affair, and that will give us the information," the other replied.

"And I have thought too of a better way for us to work the trick than for us to appear in the affair. My wife, Helen, is as smart a woman as there is in the business. I will give her the points and let her go to the hospital."

"That is a mighty good idea!" the bearded man exclaimed. "A woman stands twice the

chance that a man does to pull off a game of this kind; but will she do it?"

"Well, we will have to let her into the game; she suspects that something is up, of course, but she had no idea of what it is, and, in fact, she never bothers her head about matters which do not concern her; but if she is asked to take a part in the game, you can depend upon it that she will want to know all the particulars, or else she will not be willing to go ahead."

"That is natural," the bearded man observed. "I reckon I would not want to go it blind, either."

"We will go home and have a talk with her about the matter, and I have no doubt that when she understands how big the stake is, she will be quite willing to do her best to help us to secure the prize."

"Of course I don't know much 'bout your woman, but from what little I have seen of her, I should say that she was about as smart as they make 'em."

"Oh, yes, she is nobody's fool!"

The two proceeded up the street until they came to Broadway, then they took a down-town car, got off at Bleecker street, and entered a house which stood in the middle of the second block from Broadway.

The dwelling was one of the old-fashioned ones which in the long-ago served as the mansion of one of the merchant princes of the metropolis, but now it was divided into apartments and rented out to a dozen different families.

In three small rooms on the top floor Richard Delmayne—so the tall, gentlemanly-appearing fellow was called—and his wife resided.

Delmayne was a "crook" of the first class; as a "confidence man" he had hardly a rival in the country, and so skillfully did he manage his crooked work that it was but seldom he was caught, and on the few occasions when the police managed to get hold of him, the evidence in the case was so weak that he was able to escape punishment.

Mrs. Delmayne—Slippery Nell, to give the nick-name by which she was known to the crooks and the detectives—although there were but few of the bloodhounds who had ever had the luck to make her acquaintance—was a tall, good-looking woman of thirty-five or thereabouts, and any one who was not acquainted with her peculiar reputation would never have imagined that she was as dangerous an adventuress as New York had ever known.

The apartments of the Delmaynes were neatly furnished, and nothing about the place was there to give rise to the suspicion that the pair got their bread by unlawful means.

Delmayne passed for a "drummer" in the cigar and tobacco line, and as the rent was always paid promptly, and the pair behaved with the utmost circumspection, they were looked upon by the landlord and the inmates of the house as a model couple.

Mrs. Delmayne was lounging upon the sofa, reading a novel, when the pair entered. She laid down the book, rose to a sitting posture, and cast an inquiring glance at her husband.

He took a chair, his companion, who was known as Timothy Higgins, followed his example, then Delmayne looked at his wife and shook his head.

"Been on a business trip and unsuccessful?" she exclaimed, reading the truth in his face.

"Yes, but if you will take a hand in the game, I think we will be able to win in the end."

"What is the stake?"

"About a million!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman, surprised by the statement.

"I think it will reach that figure."

"You can count on me, of course," she declared. "Please explain!"

Delmayne did so, and when the explanation was ended, the woman hastened to declare that she could be depended upon to do all in her power to bring the game to a successful conclusion.

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE.

JOE PHENIX felt decidedly puzzled as he walked up the street after leaving the tenement-house where Violet Grahame resided.

The acute detective was not a man apt to give way to whims, nor partial to riding hobbies, but he had taken a decided interest in the case of this stranger, and had made up his mind to do his best to unravel the mystery which surrounded it.

But now he had come to a complete standstill.

He had confidently expected that from the young lady he would be able to gain some intelligence, but being disappointed in that conjecture he was at a loss how to proceed.

Of course now that he was in possession of the girl's story it was an easy matter for him to construct a romance; the victim of the assault was a messenger from her long-absent father and the copper box contained a present from him.

But as the detective was an extremely plain, matter-of-fact man he did not attach much importance to this surmise,

But despite the fact that he was not the kind of person to allow free rein to his imagination, the impression had taken possession of him that there was something out of the common in the case and that was why he took such an interest in the matter.

"Well, as I have been disappointed in my attempt to gain information from this young lady I suppose I may as well go to the hospital and see if the man is able to talk."

The detective lost no time in acting on this idea.

On his arrival at the institution he was greeted by the doctor, who asked him into his private office.

"How is the man?" Joe Phenix inquired.

"Just the same," Dr. Macdonald replied.

"No change?"

"Not the slightest, either for better or worse."

"It is an odd case."

"Yes, one of the strangest that I have ever encountered," the physician declared.

"By the way, did you read the account of the affair in the morning journals?" the doctor continued.

"Yes, and I saw that you were careful not to mention my name as being connected with the matter, as I requested," the detective remarked.

"Oh, I took care of that, for I understand how necessary it is for a man in your line of business to keep in the background as much as possible."

"It is important if a man wants to do good work."

"By the way, I forgot to mention that there has been a caller here this morning to see about the man."

The detective looked surprised at this information.

"You did not expect that, eh?" Dr. Macdonald remarked.

"No, for I got the impression that the man was a stranger, although, really, I had no good reason for believing so."

"This was a woman who had read the account of the assault in the morning newspaper and came to the conclusion, from the description, that the victim was a relative. She came early, before I had arrived, and as visitors are not admitted until after ten, she was obliged to go away without seeing the patient, but my assistant, who conversed with her, says that she gave a good description of the man."

"She most certainly acted with promptness," the detective observed.

"Yes, she said she would return at ten, and when she comes she will be able to clear up the mystery in regard to the man's identity—that is, if she hasn't made a mistake about the matter, and my assistant was inclined to think that she hasn't, for he says that she is a very intelligent woman, far above the average."

"Produced a good impression, eh?"

"Yes, my assistant was much pleased with her appearance; very much of a lady, he declares; bears quite an aristocratic name, too, Mrs. Delmayne."

The brows of the veteran detective contracted slightly.

"Mrs. Delmayne!" he said, speaking as though the name was familiar to him.

"Yes; do you know anybody by that name?"

"Well, I do and I do not," Joe Phenix answered. "That is, I am aware that a Mrs. Delmayne exists, and I should be able to recognize the lady if I met her, but I won't say that there is any personal acquaintance, for she does not know me, although it is probable that if my name was mentioned she would understand who and what I am well enough."

"I suppose I am to infer from this that the woman is not all right?"

"Correct!"

"My assistant, then, is not so good a judge of human nature as he thinks."

"It is no discredit to him to be deceived by this woman, if she is the Mrs. Delmayne that I know," the detective replied.

"Is that true?"

"It is! She is one of the most dangerous confidence women in the country, and her husband who is in the same line of business is equally expert. In fact, a more dangerous couple I do not know."

"Well, do you think this woman is acquainted with my patient, or is she trying to play some game?" the doctor inquired, his suspicions excited.

"That is not an easy matter to decide at present," the detective replied. "But with such a woman it is always safe to suspect that she is up to something wrong."

"Of course, it may be possible that she is acting honestly in this matter," the detective continued. "She may know the man, and everything may be all right, but with such a woman it is always well to be on the lookout."

"Yes, undoubtedly!" Dr. Macdonald exclaimed.

Then he happened to glance at the clock.

"It wants but five minutes of ten, so, if she is prompt, she will soon be here," he added.

"I should like to hear what she has to say for herself," Joe Phenix remarked.

"That can be easily arranged!" the doctor

declared. "When she comes I will introduce her to you as being the doctor in charge of the case, and you can examine her to your heart's content."

"Well, if you don't mind I should be very much obliged if you would follow that course," Joe Phenix observed.

"Although I have not anything to go upon, yet I suspect that there is some game afoot, and I should like to spoil it if I can," the detective continued.

"I do not suppose there is any danger of her recognizing you?"

"No, I do not think there is. I never came in contact with the woman. In fact, I never saw her but once, and that was when she was arraigned in court, about the only time, I believe, that she was ever caught, but the case did not amount to anything for at the last moment the complainant against her, a wealthy widow, whom she had succeeded in fleecing out of a couple of thousand dollars, was troubled with such a bad memory that she did not succeed in making out a case, so Mrs. Delmayne got off."

"Something crooked about the affair, I imagine," Dr. Macdonald observed.

"Yes, it was the general opinion that the widow had been got at by the friends of the woman, and such inducements held out to her that she refrained from prosecuting the case. Of course if she was not able to swear to the facts it was an easy matter for Mrs. Delmayne to get off."

At this point the doctor happened to glance out of the window, and as the view commanded the approach to the building he was able to see a well-dressed woman approaching.

"Here is the party now, I presume!" the doctor exclaimed.

Joe Phenix took a look out of the window.

"Yes, that is the Mrs. Delmayne that I know, sure enough!" the detective exclaimed.

"I will give orders to have her brought here so you will have a chance to cross-examine her," the doctor remarked.

And this he immediately proceeded to do.

In a few moments Mrs. Delmayne was ushered into the office.

"I come to see about the gentleman who was admitted to the hospital last night," she said, in a very polite and ladylike way.

"Ah, yes, pray take a chair, madam," Dr. Macdonald requested, waving his hand to a seat.

The lady sunk gracefully into the chair.

"I was here early this morning," she observed, "but was informed that visitors were not admitted until ten o'clock."

"Yes, that is the rule."

"The gentleman whom I saw then is not here," she said with a glance around.

"No, he is out at present, but this gentleman can give you all the information that we possess of the case," and Dr. Macdonald nodded to Joe Phenix.

"I read an account of the affair in the newspaper this morning," she explained, "and immediately came to the conclusion that the wounded man was my cousin, Thomas Murphy, who has just come from the West and is an entire stranger to New York."

"He only came to the city last evening," she continued, "and after having something to eat at my house—I live in Bleecker street, a couple of blocks from Broadway—started out to visit some one in Thirteenth street. I gave him directions how to proceed, but advised him to wait until morning, as I told him that the locality was a rather lonely one at a late hour, but he said he was in a hurry to get the matter off his mind and so would not wait."

"If he had taken your advice he would have been better off," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Yes, but like the majority of men he felt perfectly satisfied that he could take care of himself, and probably felt above taking the advice of one of the weaker sex," Mrs. Delmayne declared with a sly twinkle in her brilliant, dark eyes.

"The man is very badly hurt and it is doubtful if he will recover," Dr. Macdonald observed.

"Oh, my poor dear cousin!" the lady exclaimed, drawing out her handkerchief and applying it to her eyes.

"It is a very curious case," Joe Phenix added.

"It is perfectly dreadful!" Mrs. Delmayne declared, looking deeply agitated. "I came, with the idea of having him removed to my own house, for I think so much of poor Tom that I would not grudge any money to make him comfortable."

"It would not be possible for him to be moved at present," Dr. Macdonald declared. "It would be as much as his life was worth."

"Oh, isn't that too dreadful!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "But I suppose I can see the poor dear fellow and talk with him a little? I know that my presence will be apt to cheer him up."

"He is in such a condition that he would not be able to recognize you," Joe Phenix replied. "At present his mind is an absolute blank."

"It is perfectly horrible, I must say!" the

lady declared, again applying the handkerchief to her eyes as if overcome by emotion.

"Ah, if he had only heeded my warning! But men will be rash! And he had my little box with him too, which he brought clear from the wilds of Arizona as a present for me; and I suppose it is lost now."

"Aha, here is a clew at last," thought the acute detective as he listened to the words of the woman.

And the reference to the copper box impressed him with the idea that his suspicion that there was some thing odd and out of the way about this matter was not unfounded.

He suspected that this assault was no common attack by the night prowlers, ready to make a victim of the first man who came along, but on the contrary it was a carefully planned affair, and the victim had been waited for by men who knew all about him, and Joe Phenix believed the mysterious copper box was the plunder which the assailants sought.

"Well, there was a small metal box found on the man's person when he was brought to the hospital," Joe Phenix remarked.

"It is in the shape of a cylinder and is opened by a secret spring," the lady explained.

"We did not examine the box particularly," the detective explained. "But I have no doubt that it is the one of which you speak."

"Could I have it? I prize it dearly, I assure you, because poor Tom brought it all the way from the western mines for me, and if he should not recover from this dreadful attack it would possess a truly sacred interest for me."

"I regret exceedingly that I am not able to deliver the box to you," Joe Phenix replied in an extremely courteous way, and any one who did not know the detective would have supposed from his tone that he really was deeply grieved because he could not comply with the lady's request.

"Oh, is that possible?" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed, looking extremely sad.

"Yes, I regret to say that it is the truth," Joe Phenix answered. "You see, there is just so much red tape about all such matters. When a patient comes to the hospital all his belongings are carefully put away and kept for him until he is discharged."

"Yes, but this box is really my property," the lady urged.

"Of course, but as it was in the man's possession when he came into our hands we are held responsible for it," Joe Phenix explained.

"But it really seems very odd to me that when I am able to describe the article correctly, and assure you that it is my property that it cannot be given to me," the lady remarked in a tone which seemed to indicate that she was extremely surprised.

"Yes, I know it does seem to be strange," the detective admitted, speaking as though he did not wonder at the lady's surprise. "But it is the rule here and we are compelled to obey it. We have no hand in making such regulations, you understand, but it is our duty to enforce them."

"But surely there are cases when you do not strictly observe the rules," the lady remarked with a bewitching smile. "I am aware the rules which regulate an institution of this kind are supposed to be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, but I have a suspicion that once in a while an infraction of them is winked at, and I do hope that you will make an exception in my case."

"I can give you plenty of references in regard to my respectability and responsibility, you know," she added.

"Oh, that is not necessary," Joe Phenix responded with a gallant bow. "If we could make an exception we should be only too happy to do it, and we would be perfectly willing to take your personal assurance that everything was all right without putting you to the trouble of producing any references, but, unfortunately, we are not able to do so."

"Well, now, it is really too bad!" the lady declared with an extremely bewitching pout.

"Yes, if the man was able to talk so as to make a declaration in regard to the property found upon his person, we might be able to oblige you, but under the circumstances we cannot," the detective explained.

"But now that I come to think, it seems to me that there is a way by means of which you might be able to get possession of the property," he added as though an idea had just come to him.

"If you were to go before a court and make oath that this copper box is your property, and we are unlawfully withholding it from you, then the proper legal means would be employed to make us produce the box in court and all you would have to do would be to prove that the box was yours to the satisfaction of the judge and he would undoubtedly issue an order commanding us to give it to you."

"Ah, yes, I see," the lady said, affecting to be satisfied with the prospect, although it was plain that she was not.

"That is the only course open to you as far as I can see," the detective observed.

"Yes, I suppose so, but it seems to me that it is a terrible amount of trouble for me to take about a small matter," the lady remarked with

a thoughtful air as though she was debating the matter in her mind.

"I should have to employ a lawyer, I presume?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It would be expensive, of course."

"Undoubtedly."

"I guess I had better wait until poor Tom gets better, and then I will be able to get the box without going to so much trouble and expense."

"Well, it seems to me that would be the wisest course," Joe Phenix observed.

"Decidedly so!" Dr. Macdonald declared.

"If you will leave your address we will take pains to notify you the moment there is any change in the patient's condition," the detective said.

The lady gave her address without any hesitation, and then she departed.

"I shall have to keep an eye upon this charming female, I reckon," the detective declared.

"She is up to some game, and I shall make it my business to find out just what it is!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

JOE PHENIX left the hospital feeling a little more encouraged in regard to the case in which he had become interested in so strange a manner.

"I have a clew at last, and although it seemingly does not amount to much, yet if I follow it up carefully I may be able to get at the heart of the mystery," the detective mused as he went on his way.

"It is plain that the copper box must contain some articles of value, or else this woman would not be so anxious to get it into her hands."

"She is but the representative of a gang, of course, and the men in the background are undoubtedly the ones who attacked the stranger in Thirteenth street."

"If the man could only talk—could only tell who he is, and what business brings him to New York, the mystery could be speedily solved, but until he is able to speak I must grope in the dark."

Joe Phenix boarded a horse-car and mused in this fashion until he came to Broadway, where he got off.

As he reached the sidewalk he came face to face with a well-dressed, studious-looking gentleman, proceeding leisurely down the street.

This person, who looked like a professional man, greeted the detective warmly.

It was Doctor Clement Mairstone, a young Scotchman whom Joe Phenix had befriended at a time when the other, poor and unknown, was gravely contemplating suicide.

The reader who has perused the novels entitled "Joe Phenix's Silent Six," and "Joe Phenix's Combine," will readily recall the fact that the doctor and the detective were on extremely intimate terms.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Phenix!" the doctor exclaimed as he shook the hand of the detective in the most friendly way. "I have not met you for some time; how are you getting along?"

"Well, I cannot complain," Joe Phenix replied. "How does the world use you?"

"I am doing finely!"

"Still with Mr. Englebert, I presume?"

The doctor was acting as the confidential man of business for the young millionaire, Maurice Englebert, a position which he had attained through Joe Phenix's good offices, when the detective last encountered him.

"No, I am not with Mr. Englebert now," Mairstone replied. "The position never was a congenial one, although the duties were light and the pay good, yet I always felt that I was out of my element."

"I love the science of medicine, and as I was debared from practicing my profession while with Mr. Englebert I was never satisfied; still as the salary was a large one I made the best of the matter and remained until I saved enough money to enable me to hang out my 'shingle' as a doctor again."

"The acquaintances that you made while with Mr. Englebert ought to be valuable to you in your new departure."

"Oh, they are, undoubtedly! I started under very favorable auspices and already have built up quite a practice," the doctor remarked.

"You remember the old Biblical saying, 'to him that hath shall be given,' and in my opinion it contains a deal of truth. The successful man is always overrun with work no matter in what line he may be, while the poor fellow struggling along, endeavoring to keep his head above water, has all he can do to keep from sinking beneath the waves of adversity, although he may be just as skillful in every way as his more fortunate brother."

"That is true."

"What causes me to make this remark is the fact that now, thanks to the acquaintances I have made, it has been an easy matter for me to build up a lucrative practice, although it is only a little while ago that I came near starving to death in this very city, yet I was about as good a doctor then as I am now."

"This life is full of such instances."

"Then, thanks to my position as medical man and confidential adviser to a millionaire, I was solicited to take the editorship of the *American Lancet*, one of the best of our medical journals, and this was a position most congenial, for I have always been fond of scribbling."

"Your lines have been in pleasant places, then," the detective remarked.

"Yes, and I consider that I may thank you for the good fortune, for if I had not happened to meet you, the chances are great that long before this time my account with this world would have been closed, so if I can ever be of any service to you I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me, for I shall only be too happy to do anything I can for you."

"All right! If I need your aid I shall not neglect to call for it, but you need not allow the obligation to trouble you any," Joe Phenix replied.

And then a sudden idea came to him.

From what he knew of Mairstone he had faith that he was an excellent doctor, one of the kind who delighted to make a study of abstruse cases, and the thought entered Joe Phenix's mind that if he told Mairstone the particulars in regard to the wounded stranger the doctor might be able to give some good advice in regard to the case.

The detective at once acted upon the idea.

Briefly he described the situation.

Mairstone listened with the utmost attention, and when Joe Phenix came to the end, suggested that the detective should come to his rooms in Twenty-third street, where the matter could be discussed in all its bearings.

Joe Phenix thought that this was a good idea, and so the two proceeded to Mairstone's apartments.

"Here we can deliberate over the matter at our ease, and with an absolute certainty that no one can overhear our conversation," Mairstone observed, after he had provided a chair for his visitor and taken one himself.

"This is a very interesting case, indeed," the doctor continued, "and one of the very kind so attractive to me."

"If I understand the matter rightly, the man is able to talk but cannot express himself coherently."

"Yes, the wound upon his head has affected his brain, so that he is not able to converse intelligently. All he seems to be able to do is to repeat one sentence over and over again."

"A very interesting case, indeed!" Mairstone declared, with all the enthusiasm of a professional man when his particular hobby was trotted out.

"The skull is probably fractured, and a part of it pressing upon the brain produces this result."

"That was the conclusion that the doctors in the hospital came to, although they were not able to locate the fracture."

"It is very odd," Mairstone observed, musingly. "They are good men and understand their business, so are not apt to make any blunders. Still, I think I can recall a case or two of this kind set down in the books. But the idea of the man being able to talk, and yet confined, parrot-like, to a single sentence, shows that the brain has been injured. It is a parallel case to a ship without a rudder."

"It is very important that the man should be able to give an account of himself, for until I can get some idea of the nature of the business which brings him to New York it will not be an easy matter for me to get at the scoundrels who assaulted him," the detective remarked. And then he gave a full account of the suspicions which had arisen in his mind.

He did not hesitate to speak freely to the doctor about the matter for he knew Mairstone could be trusted.

"You are right; it is necessary—very necessary that the man should speak," Mairstone remarked in a reflective way.

"In such cases as this an operation is usually performed, and if the operation is successful, in a short time the man is able to talk as well as he ever did, but if it is a failure the patient dies."

"Well, I suppose I must possess my soul with patience then and wait until the operation is performed. If it is successful I will be able to get a clew, undoubtedly, to the men who committed the assault, but if the man dies then the scoundrels who attacked him will be likely to escape punishment."

"That would be a pity too!" Mairstone exclaimed. "Such ruffians ought to feel the weight of the law."

"Well, I don't see any way at present for me to get at them," the detective remarked, reflectively. "I am compelled to work in the dark and until this wounded man is able to give me some information I cannot hope to make much progress. I would give a great deal if I could find some way to get him to speak."

"A man in the condition of this one is, as I said before, a great deal like a ship without a rudder," the doctor observed. "Everything is all right but the controlling power. The injury to the head interferes with the working of the brain, as an accident to the rudder leaves the ship to the mercy of the wind and waves."

"Now if there was any way by means of

which a control could be obtained over the mind, the man could be made to talk, but, of course, that is not possible until the patient recovers from the injury."

"By Jove! your words have suggested an idea to me!" Mairstone exclaimed, abruptly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes; I am rather an odd genius, you know, and fond of dabbling in abstruse matters. If I had lived in ancient days, I, probably, would have tried my hand in searching for the Philosopher's Stone, that magic crystal which was supposed to have the power of turning all baser metals into gold, or else I would have burnt the midnight oil in an attempt to discover the Elixir of Life, the possessor of which could bid defiance to death; but as those notions have been banished long ago, I, in common with many of my professional brothers, have given my attention to the various phenomena in the shape of mind-reading, clairvoyance and spiritual manifestations, which come up with a great flourish of trumpets every now and then."

"Yes, I have given a little attention to such matters myself, and my experience has satisfied me that nine out of ten people who get up such things are the rankest kind of impostors."

"No doubt about that!" the doctor declared.

"And the tenth is an honest fanatic who allows his belief to run away with his judgment."

"Quite correct! Your conclusion accords with my own," Mairstone remarked.

"It would be a great thing for a man in my line of business if there was anything in this clairvoyance, for instance," Joe Phenix remarked.

"If these clairvoyants were only able to do what they claim, think what a help it would be to us man-hunters," the detective continued.

"Take the case of this injured man. Suppose I could take a lock of his hair, go to a clairvoyant and say: 'The man from whose head this hair was cut was attacked and almost killed last night, go ahead and tell me all about the matter.'"

"Ah, if the clairvoyants were able to do anything of the kind, rogues would not stand much chance of escaping the hand of the law," Mairstone observed.

"You are right, and we detectives would have an easy time of it."

"I have made a complete examination of clairvoyance and the spiritual manifestations, and satisfied myself that there isn't anything in either that amounts to much, and nothing at all approaching the supernatural; but there is a new idea come up lately which perplexes me: I say new, but really it isn't, for experimenters have been testing it for a long time, but it is only recently that much stir has been made about the matter. I refer to what is called hypnotism."

"I understand: the art of putting the patient to sleep and while in that condition compelling him to perform whatever commands the operator chooses to give him."

"Yes, the French savans have been looking into the matter and some of them go so far as to declare that they believe they could compel certain patients to commit any kind of a crime while in such a state."

"I read the statement."

"I regard it as being a little far-fetched, still the practice is evidently regarded as dangerous in France for they are talking about having it prohibited by law."

"Now the idea came to me that I might try my skill upon this wounded man," the doctor continued. "He has no control over his brain; perhaps I could gain one and so force him to talk. I have made a study of the matter and understand how to proceed."

"It is worth a trial," the detective declared. "And if you do not succeed there will be no harm done."

"That is true. I will admit that I do not know enough about the matter to make me feel sure of success, for it is one of those strange things which seem to baffle the wit of man, and the more one examines into it the greater becomes the puzzle."

"Yes, it is not an exact science by any manner of means but we can see what we can do."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

HAVING come to this determination, the pair resolved to lose no time, and therefore they took a carriage and proceeded to the hospital.

They found Dr. Macdonald and his assistant consulting in regard to the case of the wounded stranger.

The detective introduced Dr. Mairstone to the medical men of the hospital, and explained that he had come for the purpose of making an examination of the stranger.

"It is one of the oddest cases that we have ever had here," Dr. Macdonald remarked. "We have just completed an exhaustive examination, and cannot find any evidence to show that the man's skull is fractured, although there is very little doubt that he has sustained an injury which amounts to about the same thing, and

this fact renders it a hard matter for us to decide what we had best do for him."

"The hurt is a pretty serious one, I should judge," Mairstone observed.

"Yes; I think the chances are against the man's recovery, no matter what we do for him," Dr. Macdonald declared.

"I should like to get him to give an account of himself," the detective remarked. "For in that case I could, possibly, get a clew to the ruffians who assaulted him, and so be enabled to bring them to justice."

"I fear that there isn't much chance of your being able to get him to converse in a rational manner," Dr. Macdonald observed, with a dubious shake of the head. "All he seems capable of doing in the talking line is to repeat one sentence over and over again."

"Doctor Mairstone had an idea that by hypnotizing him it might be possible to get him to tell what I desire to know," the detective observed.

Dr. Macdonald looked surprised, and shook his head in a doubtful way.

Then Mairstone proceeded to explain.

The hospital doctors listened, but it was plain, from the expressions upon their faces, that they were incredulous, and had little faith that the scheme would succeed.

"I thought that it wouldn't do any harm to try the experiment," the detective added.

"That is a fact," Dr. Macdonald observed.

"I have read a good deal lately in the newspapers about this hypnotic business, but I did not pay much attention to it for I know by experience that these newspaper fellows like to tell big stories, and it does not do to believe all the yarns you read nowadays."

"That is very true," Mairstone remarked.

"I did not take much stock in the matter myself until I had made a careful examination and then I became satisfied that the newspaper accounts were not exaggerated. Of course, I am not positive that I will be able to do anything with this man, but as I have been very successful with the few subjects upon whom I have experimented I am encouraged to hope that I may be able to do some thing in this case."

"Well, if that is so the experiment is surely worth trying," the superintendent of the institution remarked. "I have always been a doubting Thomas in regard to such things, for the men who make a business of matters of the kind are usually a bad lot, either fools or rogues, and usually a great many more rogues than idiots."

"That is exactly what I told Doctor Mairstone," the detective observed. "But as he is a trained medical man, whose sole interest in looking into the matter is to get at the truth, it is safe to say that he will not be apt to be prejudiced either one way or the other."

"True enough!" Dr. Macdonald exclaimed.

"It will not do any harm to make the attempt even if success does not attend the experiment."

"I suppose you will require the patient to be placed in a private room."

"If you will be so kind," Mairstone replied with a bow.

"Oh, I will do all I can to insure the success of the experiment, although I will admit frankly that I have very little faith in the thing," Dr. Macdonald remarked.

He then directed his assistant to give the necessary orders and while the gentleman was absent the three went on discussing the hypnotic process in all its bearings.

In about fifteen minutes the assistant returned with the information that the patient had been removed to a private room and all was in readiness for the "seance" as Dr. Macdonald termed it.

The assistant led the way and all repaired to the private apartment to which the injured stranger had been carried.

The man had his eyes open and seemed sensible enough, but he paid no attention to the four when they entered the room and gathered by his bedside.

His eyes were fixed, looking straight ahead into vacancy and he seemed to be unconscious that there were any strangers in the apartment.

That he was a very sick man was plainly perceptible and Dr. Mairstone shook his head in a grave way after taking a good look at the patient.

"I perceive that you agree with me that he is in great danger," Dr. Macdonald said in Mairstone's ear.

"Oh, yes, there isn't any doubt about that, and to judge from his appearance I should say that there isn't much chance for him."

"That is the conclusion to which I came; the man is badly injured, and if he ever gets well it will be something like a miracle," Dr. Macdonald remarked in a tone of conviction.

"How do you feel, sir?" Mairstone asked, taking a seat by the side of the cot upon which the patient lay.

The man seemed to be conscious that he was addressed, although he did not cease to stare steadily at the wall, but he made a slight motion with the head, and then, in a peculiar mechanical way, said:

"A white, dome-shaped rock; get three pines in a line with the rock and twenty paces from the third pine, at a right angle, is the spot."

"That is all we have been able to get out of him since he came to the hospital," Dr. Macdonald remarked.

"The man is doubtless from the West—a miner, probably, and this sentence gives the direction by means of which a certain spot can be reached," Mairstone observed.

"Yes, evidently," Joe Phenix said. "It is a common custom among miners to give such directions, and it may refer to a mine or to a hiding-place where treasures have been concealed."

"Well, now I will try and see if I can do anything with the man," Mairstone remarked.

And then bending forward so as to look the patient directly in the face, he began to make sundry mystic "passes" with his hands, while the rest watched him with the utmost attention.

At first it did not seem as if the operation produced any effect upon the patient, but gradually, little by little, the gaze of the man was withdrawn from the wall, and finally he stared at Dr. Mairstone as intently as he had glared into vacancy. His eyes, too, assumed a peculiar expression, and the watchers came to the opinion that Mairstone had succeeded in gaining an influence over him.

For a good five minutes Dr. Mairstone continued his mysterious motions before he attempted to engage in conversation with the man, and then, judging from the expression upon the face of the patient that his work had been productive of good results, he said:

"You are a very sick man, my friend."

"Yes—a white dome-shaped rock—" began the other, but the doctor abruptly checked him.

"Never mind about that!" Mairstone exclaimed, in the firm tones of command. "I don't want to know anything about that at present. Have the kindness to keep quiet about that matter until I ask you about it."

"All right, just as you say," responded the man, in a very matter-of-fact way, much to the amazement of the hospital men, who exchanged glances of surprise.

"What is your name?" was Mairstone's inquiry.

"Murphy, Thomas Murphy, generally called Spotted Tom on account of my face being discolored, and the spots came from my face being burnt by a blast which went off afore I was ready for it one day; we had struck some poor rock in the mine and was firing it out with blasts."

"Yes, I see. You are from the West?"

"From Arizona."

"A mining-town?"

"Yes, Crazy Camp in the foot-hills of the Mogollon Mountains, on the head-waters of the Little Colorado River."

Mairstone glanced at the others and nodded his head as much as to say: "What do you think of this?" and the expression upon their countenances showed that they considered that it was wonderful.

"What business brought you to New York?" Mairstone continued.

"I came to find a young woman named Violet Grahame."

"What do you want of her?"

"I bring her a message from the Scotchman."

"And who is the Scotchman?"

"Well, he isn't anything now, for he is food for worms," was the rather startling reply. "But when he was alive he was the boss of Crazy Camp."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"He died very suddenly, was taken sick in the morning and about midnight breathed his last," the man explained, still speaking in the same strange mechanical tone which he had used from the beginning.

"He reckoned that he was poisoned and I reckoned that he had hit the thing off pretty near right."

"How was that? Why should any one want to poison the man?" Dr. Mairstone asked, feeling that he was getting to the heart of a dark mystery.

"Because he was the boss of Crazy Camp as I tell you, and there were some rascals in the camp who reckoned that if the boss was out of the way that they could get hold of a deal of money."

"Ah, yes, I see; and in order to get at the money the man was poisoned."

"That is about the size of it."

"What was the name of the man whom you call the Scotchman?" Mairstone asked.

Joe Phenix had told him all the particulars he had learned concerning Violet Grahame, and the doctor, when the wounded man spoke of the Scotchman, jumped immediately to the conclusion that it was probable he was the father of the girl.

"I don't know anything 'bout his name. I never heard him called anything but the Scotchman. 'Tain't the fashion, you know, for people out in the mountains to trouble themselves much 'bout men's names," the other explained. "Out thar everybody called me Spotted Tom, and I reckon that two-thirds of the men in camp couldn't have told what my name was if they had been asked."

"I understand. Tell me the particulars of

this interview which you had with the Scotchman."

"All right! thar ain't much to tell. I used to drop into his cabin 'bout every night and smoke with him before going to bed."

"The Scotchman was a strange, odd kind of a man," the westerner continued. "One of the sort who did not go much on pards, but he kinder took a notion to me for I was one of the kind who attended to his own business and did not trouble his head about his neighbor's affairs."

"On this hyer night when I went to his cabin I found him a-laying on his bunk groaning."

"'Wot is the matter, pard?' says I. 'I am afeard that I am done for,' he says. 'Thar's a bad gang in the camp hyer and I think they have done for me. They reckon that I have a heap of money under my control and they are arter it. It is my suspicion that my coffee was dosed, for I noticed that it had a rather queer taste when I drank it to-night, but I reckoned you know, that it was only my notion and so I drank it, but these hyer pains that I have got now satisfies me that I have been dosed, but the scoundrels sha'n't git what they are arter.'"

"Then his breath give out and he had to stop. I reckoned that he was going to make a die of it thar and then, but arter a spell he managed to go on."

"I have made a big strike," he said. "The biggest strike that was ever made in Arizona, I reckon, for it is my notion that it is worth a million or two!"

"That was a startling announcement!" Dr. Mairstone commented.

"Yes, but it did not take my breath away for all that," the wounded man replied. "You see, I did not take as much stock in the yarn as I might if things had been different. The Scotchman was not right in his head at times, and I didn't know but what he might have a crazy fit on when he talked 'bout striking a lead worth a million or two."

"That was natural under the circumstances," Mairstone remarked.

"This gang have been watching me, for they had a notion that I was on a search for the Lost Mine, and they thought I was going to strike it, too," he said. "I s'pose you don't know nothing 'bout the Lost Mine?"

"No, I am not posted in regard to Arizonian matters."

"Wal, this hyer Lost Mine yarn is one of the queerest that a man is likely to strike in all the West. A good many years ago some miners prospecting in the neighborhood of the Mogollon Mountains struck a lead where the gold lay so thick that it was their calculation a man could take out two or three thousand dollars a day."

"All the men of the party were old and experienced miners, but none of them had ever seen anything like this before."

"The party discovered the mine just before dark, and they only had time to take out a couple of hundred dollars' worth of gold before night put a stop to the work, and they all went to sleep a-dreaming they were millionaires."

"I don't wonder at it!" Mairstone exclaimed. "Most men would have had such dreams under like circumstances."

"But no one of the party ever saw the rich lead ag'in. They were in the heart of the Indian country and the Apaches were mighty savage in them days; that was afore the soldiers licked all the fight out of them, and in the night they came down on the miners like a thousand of bricks!"

"Only one man escaped to tell the story, and though he had some of the gold which had been taken from the mine, yet when he told of the marvelous find thar wasn't many folks willing to believe that everything was all right."

"Wal, to make a long story short, although the man hunted for the mine ag'in, he never was able to find it; mebbe he and the pards whom he got to go in with him would have had better luck if it had not been for the Apaches, but the 'tarnal red-skins were so ugly that any white men who came into the Mogollon country had a mighty hard time of it."

"The story of the Lost mine was soon known in all the mining-camps, and I s'pose two or three hundred parties tried their hands at finding it, but the red-skins were always on the watch and the most of the parties never succeeded in getting anywhere near the place where the Lost Mine was supposed to be, for the Indians made the country too hot for them."

"Only one out of the lot that went in search of the mine ever succeeded in striking it, and this was three pards who sneaked into the region, traveling by night and hiding away by day so as to escape the Indians."

"This party found the mine and took out a couple of thousand dollars' worth of gold, and then the red-skins got onter 'em and they were compelled to run for their lives."

"One was killed and two got away, but both were badly wounded. They told the story of how they had found the Lost Mine and showed the gold which they had taken as proof that their story was true, and they set to work to raise a gang to go for the mine, but while they were getting ready they got into a quarrel in a saloon one night and were both killed."

"So the mine was lost again," Mairstone observed.

"Yes, and nobody struck it ag'in, although hundreds of men spent weeks in searching for it. It finally got to be an old story, and though arter the Indians were cleaned out by the soldiers it was possible for prospectors to go in peace all though the Mogollon country, yet nobody ever found any trace of the Lost Mine, and most people began to believe that the story was only a yarn arter all, and that thar wasn't any sich thing."

"And I suppose that was the reason why you doubted the Scotchman's story when he told you that he had found it?"

"Yes; then he went on to say that he did not think he had an hour of life left and he wanted to know if I would take a message for him to a party in the East, saying that he knew he could trust me, and that I was about the only man in the camp that he placed any faith in."

"That was quite a compliment."

"Wal, I dunno 'bout that. Crazy Camp is a mighty queer place and I reckon thar is more rascals to the squar' foot in the town than in any other place you kin scare up in the West!"

"That is putting it pretty strongly."

"It is the truth and no mistake. Wal, I told him I reckoned I would do it. Then he give me a funny kind of a copper box and wrote down a direction, where I was to leave the box. Then he pulled out a hundred dollars and give it to me for to pay my expenses, and hardly had he done this when he began to weaken, and I sprung forward just in time to save him from rolling from the bed to the floor; he gasped, muttered a sentence and then fell back dead."

"What was the sentence he muttered? Do you remember it?"

"You bet I do!" the man replied. "It has been running in my ears ever since," and then he repeated the words which had come so trippingly from his tongue when questioned by the doctors.

"I suppose that this refers to the location of the mine?" Mairstone remarked.

"That is what I reckoned."

"Does it give you any idea as to where the mine is?"

"Nary time! I s'pose all the particulars are in the box though, and I tell you it was a mighty big temptation when I reflected that all I had to do was to break open the box and then I would know where the Lost mine was situated, and, mebbe, I could go and get possession of the property for myself."

"Yes, the temptation was a great one; no doubt about that," Dr. Mairstone admitted.

"But I withstood it like a man, and I was going to deliver the box when I was attacked."

"Ask him about this woman who claims to be his relative—this Mrs. Delmayne?" Joe Phenix said.

Dr. Mairstone put the question.

"Don't know any such woman," the man replied. "I ain't got any relations here in New York, or anywhar else for that matter. I hain't got a relation in the world as I know on."

Joe Phenix and the doctors exchanged glances as the wounded man thus promptly proclaimed the woman to be a fraud.

"Is that all you have to tell?" Dr. Mairstone asked.

"Yes."

"Have you any idea in regard to who attacked you?"

"No; how should I know anything about them? I have allers heard that New York was a hard place for a stranger to get along in and now I am sart'in of it."

"Is there any other question that you wish me to put to him?" Dr. Mairstone asked of the detective.

"Ask him how to get to Crazy Camp?"

"By the way of Flagstaff, which is the nearest big town. Crazy Camp lies twenty miles southeast of Flagstaff," was the reply.

Then by a few mystic passes Dr. Mairstone dispelled the peculiar sleep which he had caused to fall upon the wounded man and the seance was over.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHECK.

THE experiment had been a complete success, and when the party returned to Dr. Macdonald's office, both of the hospital men expressed their amazement.

"I would not have believed that such a thing could be done!" Dr. Macdonald exclaimed.

"And if I had not been an eye-witness to the scene, I should most certainly have doubted," the assistant declared.

"The subject happened to be an unusually good one, or else I would not have been able to make as good a showing as I did," Mairstone remarked.

"But you see, gentlemen, this new idea does not amount to half what its advocates claim for it," he added. "I was able to get the man to talk—to give the information which Mr. Phenix desired to ascertain, but, apart from that, I could not accomplish anything. The whole idea is that as the men had through accident lost the controlling power over his brains, he was not able to manage it. I supplied the power, and that is all there is to the matter."

"It is very wonderful for all that," Dr. Macdonald asserted.

"That is also my opinion," Joe Phenix remarked. "And most certainly if the doctor had not been able to exert this peculiar power, I would not have been able to get the information which I now possess."

"It is a very strange case, take it all through," Dr. Macdonald observed, reflectively. "You were right in your surmise, Mr. Phenix, that this Mrs. Delmayne was a fraud."

"Oh, yes; I felt sure of that, for I know the woman of old. She was after this copper box," the detective remarked.

"And it really seems, too, as if the Westerner had been followed clear from the mining-camp in Arizona," Dr. Macdonald observed.

"Yes, I think that is very likely," Joe Phenix replied. "Men who lead crooked lives are pretty well acquainted with each other, and it is astonishing how quickly news which concerns these rascals will travel from the East to the West, and vice versa."

"The gang in the mining camp whom the Scotchman suspected of having attempted his life were evidently after the secret of the Lost Mine, and when this Spotted Tom started for the East they immediately jumped to the conclusion that he carried the secret with him, and so pursuit was given; in my mind there is little doubt that the idea is correct, too; the secret is contained in the copper box, and that was the reason why this Mrs. Delmayne, who is acting as a tool of the gang, was so eager to get hold of it."

"No doubt—no doubt!" Dr. Macdonald observed in a tone of conviction.

"In reality this copper box belongs to the young lady of whom the man was in search when he was stricken down, this Miss Violet Grahame," Dr. Mairstone remarked.

"Yes, it is her property undoubtedly," Joe Phenix said. "And I have a strong suspicion that this man known as the Scotchman is the father of Miss Violet, James Grahame, who disappeared years ago."

"Very likely," Dr. Macdonald assented.

"And now in regard to this copper box, after the declaration that our patient has made, it seems to me to be important that Miss Grahame should be put in possession of the property as soon as possible."

"Yes, I presume that it would be advisable," the detective remarked.

"His words of course decide the question as to the ownership of the box," Dr. Macdonald declared. "And I should not have any hesitation in turning the property over to her when she makes a formal demand for it."

"I will see her as soon as possible," Joe Phenix remarked. "I agree with you that the sooner she is put in possession of the box the better."

This ended the conference; and the detective and Dr. Mairstone took their departure, and from the hospital proceeded directly to the residence of Miss Grahame.

But in this uncertain world the chapter of accidents often renders fruitless the best laid plans that cunning mortals form.

Upon arriving at the tenement-house the detective met with an unexpected check.

Miss Violet had accepted the invitation of a fellow work-girl to pay a visit to some relatives of the latter who lived a short distance away in the country, and had gone away, expecting to be absent for a week, but as to the place to which she had gone the woman who gave the detective the information could not say.

Joe Phenix was disappointed.

"I should like to have settled the matter as soon as possible," he observed to Mairstone as he quitted the house "still, I don't know as it makes any particular difference; the box is all safe and will keep until the young lady returns."

Mairstone assented to this, but Joe Phenix was so careful and methodical in his way of doing business that he took the trouble to go to the hospital and explain to Dr. Macdonald that on account of the young lady's absence, nothing could be done about the box for a week or so.

"It will be perfectly safe here, of course," Dr. Macdonald remarked.

"Oh, yes, now that you know that the box is of some value it is not likely that Mrs. Delmayne, or any of her gang, will be able to get it out of your hands by any cunning trick," Joe Phenix observed.

"You are right!" the doctor declared. "I am on my guard now, and I do not believe the smartest rascal in the world would be able to deceive me."

The detective then took his departure and the doctor proceeded to attend to his duties.

The interview had taken place in the private office of Dr. Macdonald, and as the outer door was shut both had spoken freely, having no fear that their words would be overheard, and neither one noticed that the door which led into an inner room was slightly ajar.

And from this inner apartment, after the doctor departed, came a sly, sleek looking fellow.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPY.

MATTHEW SHARP this man was named and he was one of the hospital attendants.

He was a comparatively new man, having only been in the hospital for a couple of months, but by his strict attendance to duty and his almost servile politeness he had come to be regarded as an extremely useful man; but a keen observer would have been apt to detect that there was something snake-like about the man and would have distrusted him accordingly.

A malicious grin was on his face as he entered the room and he shook his head in a knowing way.

"It seems to me that there ought to be some money in this thing for me," he muttered.

"Isn't it queer now how things turn out sometimes?" he continued in a reflective way. "When I got this 'ere birth I thought I was placing myself beyond the reach of temptation; and then the first thing I know up comes this thing, but I would be a donkey not to avail myself of a chance to make a stake when it comes right in my way. I shall have to hunt the Delmaynes up, but I can do that easily enough."

Then the man proceeded to Dr. Macdonald, and, under the plea that he had some important business to which attention must be given, secured a leave of absence.

After leaving the hospital Sharp went straight to the Bowery and entered a saloon well-known to the police as being a noted resort for crooks.

The bartender greeted Sharp as an old acquaintance, and when he inquired in regard to the whereabouts of Dick Delmayne, the barkeeper was able to direct him to the house of the noted confidence man, for the barkeeper and Delmayne were on particularly intimate terms.

Twenty minutes later Sharp was admitted by Mrs. Delmayne to the cozy parlor of the crooked pair.

Delmayne himself was in the apartment, also the Westerner, the thick-set, black-bearded man, Tim Higgins.

"Hello! where do you come from?" Delmayne exclaimed when he caught sight of Sharp's smirking face.

"I am an orderly in the hospital now under Dr. Macdonald," the new-comer replied as he helped himself to a chair.

The three exchanged glances.

"The man is under my care that you laid out in Thirteenth street last night," Sharp continued in a matter-of-fact way.

A look of profound astonishment, not unmixed with alarm, appeared upon the faces of the three listeners.

"What the blazes are you talking about?" Delmayne exclaimed in an angry way.

"Oh, it is all right!" Sharp replied with a chuckle. "You needn't get worried. I am not going to give the thing away. All I wanted to do was to show you that I was up to your little game."

"Our little game?" growled the confidence man, who was most thoroughly astonished and considerably alarmed.

"Yes, but from the way the thing looks now I can tell you that you are going to have an awful hard time to work it."

The three gazed at each other in astonishment for they could not understand how it could be possible for Sharp to know anything about the matter even if he was in the hospital.

Sharp indulged in a prolonged chuckle when he noted the look of amazement upon the countenances of the others.

"You are puzzled now, ain't ye?" he cried. "It jst beats your comprehension how I was able to get on to your little game."

"Suppose you explain so that we will understand what you are driving at," Delmayne said in a rather sulky way.

"Certainly!" Sharp exclaimed in a brisk and cheerful manner. "I can see that you are a little doubtful about the matter—you are thinking, maybe, that I don't know as much about the thing as I am making out, but if you have any notions of the kind I can tell you that you are away off, for I am fully posted."

"Oh, yes, you were always a sharp rooster—Sharp by name and sharp by nature!" Delmayne exclaimed, in a sneering way.

"Now you are trying to poke fun at me, but I can tell you that there is a deal of truth in that, although you don't believe it," the other replied.

"For all your sharpness you got nipped the last time you tried to work a game!" the confidence man asserted.

"That is the truth, every blessed word of it; and I am not the man to deny it," Sharp replied, not at all affected by the sneering remark.

"I did get tripped up, and better men than I am have met with the same misfortune, and when I came out of the stone jug I made up my mind to live on the square for awhile, try a straight life, you know, just to see how it would work, so through some friends I got into the hospital, and I have been as straight as a string ever since I have been there."

"Very commendable on your part, I am sure!" exclaimed Delmayne, with another sneer. "I don't think that is the right way for you to talk, Dick," Mrs. Delmayne observed.

She had the reputation of being much the

quicker-witted of the two, and her husband's manner did not impress her favorably.

"I am sure that we have always found Mat Sharp to be true blue, and when he was nipped by the police, if he had chosen to squeal on his pals, he would undoubtedly have got off with a lighter sentence; but he didn't, and that shows what kind of a man he is."

"Much obliged to you, Mrs. Delmayne," Sharp replied, with a polite bow. "It takes a smart woman like yourself to see on which side your bread is buttered. But I don't mind what Dick says, for I know him of old, and understand that he has to do just so much growling or else he wouldn't be happy. I left a crooked life because it seemed to me as if I was in for a run of bad luck, and I am like the gamblers in believing that when a man strikes a run of bad luck, the quicker he gets out of the game the better it will be for him."

"Well, I suppose that is so," Delmayne assented.

"Not a bit of a doubt about it!" Tim Higgins chimed in, for he had all the miner's faith in good and bad luck.

"And the thing has worked well, too," Sharp declared. "I have got along nicely since I have been at the hospital, and now here comes along a plum ready to drop right into my hands, if I only take the trouble to shake the tree a little."

"What are you driving at? explain!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed.

"It is this game that you are trying to work," Sharp replied. "It is not of any use for you to pretend ignorance, for I am up to the whole thing. The Westerner, who now lies badly injured in the hospital, was attacked by you on Thirteenth street, but you didn't get what you was after. Then Mrs. Delmayne tried the boldest kind of a game, and made a bluff at the hospital so as to get hold of the copper box, but wasn't able to work the trick. I think that you will see now that I know what I am talking about," and Sharp grinned in a very knowing way.

After this disclosure, of course it was plain to the plotters that the hospital man was in possession of all the facts, and Mrs. Delmayne voiced the opinion of the others when she said:

"You have got the thing down very fine, and it isn't of any use for us to pretend that what you say isn't so."

"That is the way to talk!" Sharp declared. "What is the use of beating about the bush with an old rounder like myself?"

"Well, now, boys, as I am on the inside, I am able to see just how this game is going, and I can tell you that you don't stand any chance to pull anything out of it."

This declaration fell like a wet blanket on the plotters, and they shook their heads in an uneasy way.

"You see, Mrs. Delmayne, although you played your cards to the queen's taste, yet you did not stand any chance to win, for Doctor Macdonald—he is the superintendent of the hospital—knew all about you before you came."

The woman looked astonished, for this information took her completely by surprise.

"I don't understand how that could be!" she exclaimed. "Neither one of the gentlemen whom I saw treated me as if they had any suspicion that every thing was not all right."

"One of the men was the detective, Joe Phenix," Sharp remarked with a grin.

Both of the Delmaynes looked dumfounded at this intelligence.

"Don't you know Phenix by sight?" the husband cried.

"No, I never saw the man in my life, although I have heard enough about him!" the confidence queen exclaimed, angrily.

"He knows you! You can bet a fortune on that!" Sharp declared.

"You see you were out of the race right from the beginning."

"How comes it that the detective was there?" Mrs. Delmayne asked, an angry frown upon her face, for she felt fiercely enraged at being thus tricked.

"Blessed if I know!" Sharp replied. "All that I am up to about the matter is that the detective has been to the hospital and is taking the biggest kind of interest in this Murphy case, and as he knows that you are after the copper box you can bet all you are worth that he suspects the pals who are back of you are the men who assaulted this stranger."

The Westerner looked alarmed at this information.

"I say, Dick, we had better look out or this fellow will get us in a tight place!" Higgins exclaimed.

"Oh, don't worry yourself yet," Delmayne replied. "It is one thing to suspect men of having committed a crime and another thing to prove that they did it."

"That is so! You can gamble on that!" Sharp declared with a knowing wink.

"I am not afraid of this detective bringing the assault home to us, clever as he is," the confidence man remarked.

"The only thing about the matter that worries me is that now that Joe Phenix has become

mixed up in the affair the chances are big that it will be a difficult matter for us to carry out our plans."

"Oh, yes, you can bet high now that your cake is all dough!" Sharp declared.

"In some way the doctors have managed to get the wounded man to talk," he continued. "How the trick was worked is a mystery, for since he came to the hospital he has been clear off his nut all the time, and all we can get out of him is one sentence which he repeats over and over, but the strange doctor that came with Joe Phenix by some hocus-pocus got conversation out of the man, for the detective knows all about the copper box. Murphy was bringing it to a Miss Violet Grahame who lives in Thirteenth street when he was laid out. He has told Doctor Macdonald that the box belongs to Miss Grahame and the detective went after her with the idea of bringing her to the hospital so she could get the box, which Doctor Macdonald stands ready to give her, but the girl has gone out of town for a visit—will not be back for a week, and hasn't left any address, so nothing can be done in the matter until she comes back."

"By Jove! that is lucky!" Delmayne exclaimed.

"Yes, for it gives us a chance to get in a little fine work with the assistance of friend Sharp here," the confidence queen remarked.

"You bet! this is where I come in!" the sneak thief exclaimed with a grin.

"Doctor Macdonald, I suppose, told the detective that he would keep the box safely until Miss Grahame returned," Miss Delmayne observed.

"Oh, yes, and he said that no woman of your inches would be smart enough to get the box away from him," Sharp replied.

"The doctor better not crow too loudly—the game is not ended yet!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed with a mocking smile.

"I suppose, Sharp, that you think there is a chance for you to take a hand in this game," Dick Delmayne observed.

"Yes, I thought there was."

"Where is the box?" the confidence queen asked.

"Locked up in the steward's safe; that is where all such valuables are put," Sharp replied.

"What kind of a safe is it—old or new?" Mrs. Delmayne asked, in a brisk, business-like way.

"Old! it can be cracked easily enough for it hasn't any of the modern improvements."

"Yes, but hold on!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "It strikes me that it will not be an easy matter to crack a safe in a building like a hospital, where there are people on the watch all the time, by night as well as by day."

Sharp grinned.

"Ah, Mrs. Delmayne, it wasn't for nothing that you got the name of Slippery Nell, and, in my opinion, anybody who gets ahead of you will have to get up precious early in the morning!"

"Well, I don't think that I am anybody's fool!" the woman declared.

"Decidedly not! and you are right in thinking that it would not be an easy matter to crack the hospital safe, although it is an old concern and does not amount to much, but there are so many people around that some one would be sure to take the alarm," Sharp remarked.

"You have a plan in your head though, or else you wouldn't have come to us about this matter," the confidence queen remarked, shrewdly.

Sharp laughed as though he considered that the speech contained a good joke.

"Can't fool you much!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you are right; I have a little scheme in my head, and a few words will explain it."

"The steward is an old Scotchman and extremely fond of liquor, but he is such an old soaker that it takes a deal to get him under the weather. I act as his assistant, and since I have been in the hospital I have done my best to get on the right side of the old man. He keeps pretty straight during the day, but at night, after everything has settled down, he goes for his little bottle, and usually gets pretty full before he goes to bed."

"He is a sociable old man and he generally invites me to come in and take a few drinks before I go to bed. His sleeping room is right off the apartment where the safe stands, and it will be an easy matter for me to drug his liquor, so that after he has taken three or four drinks he will be done for. Then I can get at the safe."

"You have become familiar with the combination, I suppose," Mrs. Delmayne asked.

"Oh, yes; it was no trouble for me to learn it, for I am with the old man when he opens and closes it every day."

"The scheme ought to work all right," Mrs. Delmayne observed, thoughtfully.

"I think so. The box is stuck away in an inner pigeon-hole and is not likely to be missed until some one goes to the safe after it, which will not be for a week."

"Then if this Joe Phenix is half the detective that he is cracked up to be it is certain that suspicion will fall on you, for when he comes to examine into the matter he will be sure to look up your record and then he will discover that you

have been in trouble," Mrs. Delmayne observed in a thoughtful way.

"Ah, yes, I have reflected upon that matter, and I do not intend to remain where Mr. Joe Phenix can get at me!" Sharp declared.

"I think I see a chance to make a good stake out of this thing, and if I am successful, the moment I clutch the cash I shall vamoose the ranch, as a Westerner would say, so quickly that it will be apt to make my head swim!"

"Having a week's start you ought to be able to get away," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"And even if you should happen to be caught, as long as the copper box is not discovered in your possession it will be a hard matter for the keenest detective to prove that you stole it," Mrs. Delmayne observed, thoughtfully.

"Exactly! you have calculated just as I did," Sharp remarked. "And now comes the point: what will you pay for the copper box delivered into your hands? I suppose by the row that has been kicked up about it that it is pretty valuable and you ought to be willing to give a good, big sum for it."

"Well, I don't know about that," Dick Delmayne replied. "It is a good deal like buying a cat in a bag. The contents of the box may be very valuable, and then again they may not be."

"Will you go a thousand?" Sharp asked.

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Delmayne cried, before either of the men could speak. "Such a sum is not to be thought of for a moment!"

"Ah, come now! you want to drive a hard bargain!" the sneak thief declared. "I don't doubt that the box is worth five or ten thousand or else you wouldn't be taking so much trouble about the matter."

"It is just as Dick says—it is buying a pig in a poke!" the confidence queen declared. "We may be able to make a good stake out of the thing and then again we may not. Anyway, the box is not worth a cent over three hundred dollars to us."

"Oh, we cannot trade!" the sneak thief declared, rising to his feet as if to depart. "I would undertake the job for no three hundred!"

"That is all we are willing to pay!" Mrs. Delmayne declared, firmly. "And as far as you are concerned it is like picking up money in the street. I have known you many a time take a bigger risk for a ten dollar note!"

Sharp advanced to the door and laid his hand upon the knob.

"Make it four hundred and it is a go!" he said persuasively.

"Can't do it!" the confidence queen declared, firmly. "We could not make it three ten!"

"Well, well, the risk is too big for the money!" Sharp replied, but he did not offer to leave the room, and it was plain that he was wavering in his mind.

"Three hundred, cash on the nail the instant the box is delivered into our hands!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "And the way the thing is fixed you never had a chance to scoop in three hundred chucks more easily in your life!"

Sharp reflected for a moment, then having come to the conclusion that he couldn't do any better, said he would accept.

"When can we expect you?" Dick Delmayne asked.

"To night! there isn't anything like striking when the iron is hot!" the sneak thief declared and then he took his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRICK IS WORKED.

SHARP made his way back to the hospital feeling pretty well satisfied with the bargain he had made.

"It ought to be a thousand," he muttered. "But I know Slippery Nell of old, and when she said three hundred a man would be safe in betting that she wouldn't raise the limit for all the talk in the world."

"She was right too about the job being an easy one. It is like picking up money—and I feel just as sure of that little three hundred as if I had the cash in my pocket this blessed minute!"

On his homeward route he took in the Bowery, halted at the saloon where he had inquired concerning Dick Delmayne's whereabouts, and got the barkeeper to put him up a "knocker-out," as a bottle of drugged liquor is called by the rogues who use the stuff, so as to be able to plunder their victims without the men being capable of offering any resistance.

After arriving at the hospital Sharp reported for duty and proceeded to attend to his avocation as usual.

The wounded man's condition had changed for the worse. Dr. Macdonald had been summoned and a consultation held, the result of which was that an operation was decided upon as the only hope of saving the man.

It was performed, was unsuccessful, and the patient was brought so near to death's door that it was not anticipated he would live through the night.

Sharp was one of the attendants who assisted during the operation, and he shook his head gravely when he heard that the man was doomed.

"Well, the copper box didn't bring him any luck," he remarked, communing with himself.

"If he hadn't taken the job of bringing this 'ere box to New York he might have been alive and well at this moment."

"And now I come to think of it, this copper box will be mighty liable to get old man Martin in a scrape too, for the thing has been consigned to his care, and when it is found to be missing there will be a precious row kicked up, and he will be blamed, sure!"

And then the sleek rascal chuckled gleefully as he reflected upon the scrape into which his deed would plunge the old Scotchman.

"So there's two men to whom the box will be apt to bring ill-luck."

Then he chuckled again, but when an idea suddenly flashed across his brain his merriment abruptly ceased.

"Hold on!" he muttered. "I hope I ain't going to get into no scrape in going into this thing! I hope there isn't any hoodoo 'bout this copper box, for blame me if I want any thing of the kind in mine!"

He shook his head in a solemn way and fell to meditating about the matter.

Like the majority of crooked men he was a slave to superstition.

But after debating over the matter for a while he resolved to go ahead in the work which he had undertaken.

"I would be a blamed fool, to allow myself to be scared out of a chance to collar three hundred chucks just because a man has croaked on account of the copper box," he muttered.

"No, sir-ee! I ain't a-going to be scared!" he declared. "And if I don't make a slip-up in the thing I will have that three hundred dollars in my fingers before I am twelve hours older!"

Acting on this idea he sought the old Scotchman in his room when the duties of the day were done.

The steward was a great checker-player and in order to get on the right side of the old man, Sharp pretended to be deeply interested in the game, so the pair were wont to play until about ten o'clock, when the steward would produce his bottle of whisky and for an hour the two would drink and converse upon different topics.

On this particular evening things went on as usual, excepting that the old man got tired of beating his opponent, which he invariably did with the greatest ease, no matter whether he was drunk or sober, and produced his liquor at half-past nine instead of ten.

This did not suit Sharp in one way, for he did not want the old man to get ready for bed until about eleven, for there was danger that some of the attendants might come in, and discover the condition of the steward, for Sharp hoped to have him completely "paralyzed" in a short time; in another it was all right, for it gave more time for the liquor to take effect.

If the steward about finished his own bottle he would be in such a condition that it would only take a couple of drinks of the drugged liquor to throw him into a stupor so profound that the apartment could be turned inside out without his being conscious of what was going on.

The steward's liquor was contained in a plain whisky bottle, and Sharp had taken care to have the drugged liquor put in a similar vessel, and as there was only a small quantity in it, the crook trusted that he would be able to get a chance to substitute one bottle for the other without the Scotchman being aware of the change.

All went well.

Sharp cunningly got the steward into a conversation regarding the ancient glories of the "Land of Cakes," a subject dear to the heart of every true son of Scotland, and as the old man dilated upon the subject the minutes slipped rapidly away.

The whisky was not neglected during the conversation, and about eleven o'clock it began to run low.

By this time every one in the hospital, except the night attendants, had retired to rest, and the wily crook knew that there was very little danger that any one would come to the room.

The Scotchman was well under the influence of the potent liquor, and Sharp judged that the time had come for him to put his scheme into execution.

He had his bottle all ready under the table, and under pretense that he heard some one advancing along the hall toward the room he got the drunken steward to turn his head to listen.

This was a task which it took the Scotchman a minute or so to perform, for he considered it necessary to turn completely around in order to listen, and although the Scotchman was such an old drinker that the liquor had not obscured his senses, yet it interfered considerably with his bodily motions.

Sharp seized upon this opportunity to change the bottles, putting the one containing the drugged liquor in place of the Scotchman's.

"No, mon, you are wrong, there's na one coming!" the steward declared, speaking with a broad accent, as was common with him when his brain was heated by liquor.

"Yes, I think I was mistaken." Then Sharp took a look at his watch. "Hello! it is after eleven. It is time for me to go to bed."

The Scotchman grasped the bottle and held it up to the light.

"Hold on, mon, don't go until we have finished the bottle!" he exclaimed. "There's a few wee drops of liquor left, and it would be a shame not to send them after the rest of the tippie."

"All right, just as you say," Sharp replied.

The Scotchman then filled out a big drink for each of them.

"I will give you a toast, mon," he said. "We will drink to the poor devil with the copper box who is looking for a speedy passage across the dark river, heaven rest his soul!"

"Oh, I will drink that with all my heart!" Sharp exclaimed, apparently making light of the matter, yet he was a little troubled by the steward's reference to the subject at such a moment.

As we have said, the crook was extremely superstitious.

The old man drained his glass at a swallow.

Sharp pretended to do the same, but was taken with a violent fit of coughing, during which he managed to spit the drugged liquor out on the floor.

"Hoot, mon, you've wasted all your whusky!" the Scotchman exclaimed, his voice thick and husky.

The "knocker-out" had already begun to take effect.

"Oh, that is all right!" Sharp exclaimed. "You need not be afraid but what I will do justice to the liquor."

"It is fine stuff, mon, the kind to make your hair curl!" the steward announced, and he filled his glass half full.

"Well, if that don't knock him silly then the stuff ain't up to the mark," Sharp remarked to himself as he refilled his glass.

"Mighty good stuff, mon, it warms the cockles of a mon's heart!" the old Scotchman declared.

And then as before he disposed of the fluid at a single swallow, smacking his lips as though he richly enjoyed the drink.

Although the steward was a well-seasoned old toper, yet he could not help succumbing to the power of the drug which had been infused in the whisky.

His eyes closed, his chin drooped upon his breast, and a few low, mumbling, unconnected words escaped from his lips.

Sharp improved the opportunity to slyly pour his whisky upon the floor.

Although from the appearance of the old Scotchman he fancied he was so thoroughly under the influence of the drug that he was unconscious of what was passing around him, yet the crook was too cautious to spill his whisky openly.

After the glass was emptied he made a pretense of drinking from it, smacked his lips and exclaimed:

"That is about as good whisky as a man is likely to get hold of nowadays!"

His words fell upon unheeding ears.

The Scotchman was done for; thrown by the powerful drug into a deathlike stupor, he was completely oblivious to all that was passing around him.

"Well, I have got him just where I want him!" Sharp exclaimed, with a chuckle. "Now the next thing is to get him on the bed, for if I leave him on the chair he may fall off and break his neck before morning."

The crook was a wiry, muscular fellow, and it was not a hard matter for him to get the old Scotchman, who was small and thin in flesh, from the chair to the bed.

"And now then for the copper box!" Sharp exclaimed, after he had disposed of the steward to his satisfaction.

He proceeded to the safe, and thanks to the knowledge which he had gained regarding the combination, was able to open it without any trouble.

"I wish I may die if this ain't working in a perfectly beautiful manner!" he exclaimed with a chuckle, as he swung open the heavy safe door.

"Slippery Nell was right—she knew what she was talking about when she said that this job would be like picking up money in the street!" and again the crook chuckled.

He opened the door of the inner compartment, and from it took the copper box.

"I've done the trick to the queen's taste!" he cried.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

THE copper box had been contained in a canvas bag, arranged with straps so that it could be worn around the waist like a money-belt.

The bag had been put in the safe with the box, and the crook came to the conclusion that the easiest way to carry the box was to put it in the bag, and buckle the straps around his waist, just as the Westerner had done.

It only took a few moments to complete this arrangement, and then the crook rose to his feet, chuckling with satisfaction.

"Well, blow me tight, if this ain't just the nicest job that I have struck for a dog's age!" he exclaimed.

"Why, I feel just as sure of that three hundred as though I had the money in my hand now," he added, with another series of chuckles.

"Dick Delmayne thought he was mighty clever when he said that I was Sharp by name and sharp by nature, but there is an old saying that there is many a true word spoken in jest, and you can bet your life that that is about so!"

Then the crook fell to meditating on the situation.

"I have grabbed the box all right," he mused. "Now the next thing is to decide how I had better work the rest of the trick. Shall I wait until morning before I give up the swag, or shall I go for that little three hundred right away, to-night?"

It was a momentous question, and it took Sharp a few minutes to make up his mind.

"Delays are dangerous!" he exclaimed, at last. "I have heard that said a good many times, and I know lots of cases where it proved to be true.

"I am off duty now, and don't go on until six in the morning, so that if I leave the building nobody will think that there is anything out of the way.

"Now, there isn't any doubt in my mind that the proper caper for me will be to get this box into Delmayne's hands and get my three hundred checks as soon as possible, therefore I will be off at once.

"I mustn't neglect to close the safe, so that everything will look to be all right!" Sharp exclaimed, in conclusion.

It only took him a moment or two to shut the safe door and lock it by means of the combination.

"There, now!" he exclaimed, in exulting tones. "You can bet your life that I have done this job up brown!"

Then he rose to his feet and looked around him with a grin of satisfaction upon his features.

"I think it will puzzle the keenest detective that ever lived to tell how this job was worked!" he declared, "for everything about the safe is all right, and yet the box is gone.

"Any way it will probably be a week or so before the box will be missed, and by that time I will be a couple of thousand miles away from New York.

"It has been my opinion for some time that the New York climate don't agree very well with me, and so I will try a change of air for my health!" And then the man chuckled merrily at the jest.

"I will just take a look at the Scotchman and then be off," he added. "My stars! won't he have a head on him when he wakes up in the morning! He has been on many a drunk in his time, but I don't believe that he ever struck one that will be apt to stay with him longer than the one that I put him up to, and you can bet high that it will be a mighty big puzzle to him."

Then with a broad grin on his face he approached the bed upon which the old Scotchman reclined.

The man had not moved, but lay in exactly the same position in which Sharp had put him.

"Well, now, anybody can say what they like, but that 'knocker-out' is a mighty big thing, and the man who first got it up must have had the biggest kind of a head on his shoulders!

Why, the man is as quiet as though he was laid out for a funeral!

Then the peculiar ashy paleness of the old man's face struck the crook.

He looked at the Scotchman for a moment and the smile faded from his lips.

"I don't like the look of his face," he muttered. "Blame me if he don't appear as if he had croaked!"

He bent over the Scotchman and examined him intently.

Not a sign of life was there about the man—his breathing had apparently stopped and Sharp began to grow anxious.

"Hang the luck!" he growled. "Can it be that the dose was too strong? It ought not to have been. An old sonker like Martin ought to be able to stand a knocker-out of this kind without being phased by it."

The crook placed his hand upon the cheek of the Scotchman, and to his fancy it was already growing cold.

"Oh, this all nonsense!" he cried. "And I am a fool to allow myself to give way to fear!" The man is all right—just in a stupor, that is all."

Despite the confident way in which he spoke the crook had become nervous and his hand trembled as he opened the Scotchman's vest in order to discover if his heart was beating.

It was not.

The steward was dead!

For a good five minutes after making this appalling discovery the crook stood like a statue and stared with a white face at the stricken man.

There was but little more color in his cheeks than in those of the unfortunate steward.

At last, with an effort, Sharp roused himself from his abstraction.

"Come, come, this won't do!" he muttered.

"The man is dead and there is no help for it, but I wish I may be struck blind this very minute if I had any idea that the knocker-out would damage him any. I have given it to a dozen men and none of them were any the worse for it except that they had a big head on them in the morning.

"I s'pose the man's time had come, and that is all there is to the matter."

Then to the mind of the crook suddenly came the remembrance of the superstition which he had conceived regarding the copper box.

"Blow the thing!" he cried. "It can't be possible that there is any truth in the idea which came to me that this ere box brings bad luck to whoever gets hold of it!

"That is all nonsense, of course, but it is mighty strong the way things have worked.

"Here's this bloke from the West brings the box to New York and gets knocked on the head for his pains, and the chances are big that he is dead by this time.

"Then the box is put in charge of the Scotchman, and in order to get at it I give Martin a knocker-out and he croaks instanter!

"Now I have got the blamed thing, and the question comes up, is it going to bring bad luck to me as it has to these other two?"

The crook shook his head in a nervous way as he meditated over the situation.

"Blamed if I am going to be fool enough, though, to give the thing up, after all the trouble I have taken to secure it!" he declared at last, in a dogged way.

"The only thing is to get rid of the box as soon as possible. I will be off to the Delmaynes right away, turn over the box, get my three hundred checks, and be quit of the matter!"

Having come to this resolution, the crook proceeded to carry it out.

He took a last look at the lifeless Scotchman, shook his head in a doleful way, muttering as he did so:

"Tain't my fault no way you can fix it! The man's time had come, or else a little common knocker-out would not have sent him to kingdom come in no such way."

Then he hurried from the room as though anxious to rid himself of the sight of his victim.

When he was in the hall, though, his usual self-possession returned to him, and he proceeded to his room as though nothing out of the common had occurred.

He got his hat, and from his trunk took a peculiar sort of club, composed of braided leather, which concealed a leaden ball at one end about half as big as a hen's egg, and at the other was a loop, which could be passed around the wrist, so that no sudden jerk could take the club out of the user's hand.

This was the favorite weapon of the English crook, known across the water as a "life-preserver," although a life-destroyer would be a far more appropriate title; the Philadelphia and Baltimore ruffians are partial to a weapon which resembles this imported tool, and which they call a black-jack.

Sharp balanced the weapon in his hand for a moment, and then slipped it into the right-hand pocket of the sack-coat which he wore, with the remark:

"I will take this little joker with me, for there is no knowing but what it may come in handy."

Then he quitted the apartment, and made his way out of the hospital.

At the main entrance he encountered the night doorkeeper.

"I thought I would go out for a walk," the crook remarked in his bland, insinuating way.

"It's a beautiful night," the doorkeeper observed.

This was the truth, for the air was mild and a round full moon made the night almost as light as day.

"Yes, that is so; I don't feel at all sleepy and I thought that a walk would do me good."

Then Sharp passed out into the air.

"I shall breathe a blamed sight freer when I get rid of this infernal copper box!" the crook muttered as he walked up the street.

"It will not take me long to get to Bleeker street though, and then I will get rid of the blamed thing and collar my ducats."

Just as he ended the sentence a stoutly-built, athletic-looking man, in dark clothes, came out of a doorway on the same side of the street as that on which Sharp was advancing.

The crook suspected there was trouble ahead immediately, although the new-comer was nicely dressed in a dark business suit, and there wasn't anything about him calculated to cause alarm.

But, "the thief doth fear each bush an officer," and as Sharp's superstition that the copper box was destined to bring bad luck to the men into whose possession it came had already made him nervous and apprehensive, the moment the stranger made his appearance the crook anticipated danger.

His right hand was in his inside pocket, grasping the leather club, and as soon as he saw the man he quietly withdrew the hand from his pocket, and allowed it to fall by his side, concealing the weapon, which the hand grasped, by pressing it against his clothes.

The stranger halted in the center of the sidewalk, evidently intending to arrest Sharp as he came up.

This action increased the crook's suspicions, and now he was sure that the man meant mischief.

Sharp had no fear, though, but that he would be able to handle the stranger, armed as he was with so dangerous a weapon.

The crook was an Englishman, and in early life had been a boxer and a runner of no mean repute, and therefore was perfectly at home when it came to either a fight or a foot-race, and, in his judgment, it looked as if he was in for both.

"Can you tell me what time it is?" asked the stranger when Sharp came up to him.

"Haven't got any watch," replied the crook.

Then the man took a good look at Sharp's face and gave a nod of recognition.

"Hello! I thought I knew you when you came up!" the other declared.

The crook shook his head, and stared in a blank way in the face of the other.

"I think you have the advantage of me," he said. "I don't remember to have ever seen you before."

"Oh, yes, you have!" the stranger responded in a confident way. "Your name is Sharp—Mat Sharp, while mine is Fitzgerald, and I am the detective that nailed you the last time you were arrested—the Fifth Avenue job, you know."

Strange as it may appear the crook had not recognized the detective, but this was because when Fitzgerald had arrested him some fifteen months back, the detective had worn a heavy beard while now his face was cleanly shaven, and this fact made such a difference in his personal appearance that it is no wonder that Sharp did not remember him.

"I think you have made a mistake," the crook said, determined to brazen it out, and at the same time taking a firmer grip on the life-preserver.

"Oh, no, no mistake about the matter!" the detective declared in the most positive way. "I know you well enough. You are Mat Sharp, one of the cutest sneak-thieves in the business, and I suppose you have been up to some deviltry to-night, eh?"

"Oh, no, you are dead wrong!" the crook replied in a very humble way.

He had come to the conclusion that it wasn't of any use for him to try to persuade the detective that he had made a mistake; the man was too positive—too certain of his identity to be fooled.

The only chance he had to get out of the scrape, so that the officer would allow him to go on about his business, was to talk sweet and so pull the wool over the detective's eyes.

"You are the man I put the bracelets on! There's no mistake about that!" the detective exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I will admit that I did get in a little trouble a while ago, but I am no regular crook, although I am aware that a good many people tried to make out that I was, but it is the old story of give a dog a bad name and hang him."

"Ah, that is what you fellows always say!" Fitzgerald exclaimed, incredulously.

"I wish I may die if it ain't the blessed truth, Mr. Fitzgerald!" Sharp declared, in an extremely humble and earnest way.

"And I give you my word that since I got out of that scrape—the time you nailed me, you know—I have been living as square as a die!"

"Is that so?"

"I will take my Bible oath that it is!" the crook replied.

"Men of your class don't usually care much for oaths."

"Why, Mr. Fitzgerald, I wouldn't go for to deceive you for the world!" Sharp protested.

"Ah, you are only trying to fool me, I reckon!"

"Oh, no, honor bright! I am giving you the straight tip and no mistake!" Sharp replied.

"If you don't believe me, just inquire at the hospital where I have been working for quite a time."

"Don't give it away, you know, that I have ever been in trouble, for that would fire me out of my situation immediately. You know how that is. People don't like to have a man around that has ever been in trouble; but just go and ask them what kind of a man I am, just as if I had applied to you for a situation, and you were thinking of hiring me if the report was all right. Keep it dark, you know, that you are a detective, and if the hospital people don't give me the best of characters then I am willing that you should tell them that I am one of the worst crooks that ever struck New York, and the quicker they fire me out, the better it will be for them."

"Well, that is a pretty fair offer," the detective said in a meditative way.

"You had better believe that it is!" the crook asserted. "But it is just as I tell you, I am on the square now and I am not afraid to have anybody look into my record."

"That is a wise way to be situated," the officer remarked. "So much better than to be in fear of getting the collar at any moment, and

always having to be on the lookout to dodge a fly-cop."

"Oh, yes, that is so. Why I don't believe that you can really appreciate how much better a man feels."

"Yes, I can; although I have never been situated in that way myself yet I can understand how a man must feel."

"But to come back to our mutton," continued the officer. "This idea of yours that I should go to the hospital and inquire about you doesn't strike me as being a particularly good one under the circumstances."

"How so?" inquired the crook in an extremely innocent way.

"Just consider how late it is!" the detective replied. "All the people in the hospital are in bed—that is the principal men, of whom I would have to inquire, and it stands to reason that the doctors would think that it was mighty funny that a man should come at such an hour as this to inquire about a fellow's character."

"Well, yes, I suppose that it would seem queer. I never thought about that," Sharp admitted.

In truth the man only made the suggestion with the idea of lulling the detective's suspicions and he had no idea that the officer would take the trouble to go to the hospital.

"You can see yourself that the doctors would be apt to think there was something wrong about the matter," Fitzgerald argued. "And the chances are big too that some of the doctors would know me, for I am about as well-known around town as any of the men in the detective squad, and then all the fat would be in the the fire."

"That is so!"

"Suspicion would be at once excited and the result would probably be that you would lose your place."

"Like as not."

"So it will not do to work that scheme."

"S'pose you come in the morning?" Sharp suggested, "then the thing will go through all right."

"I can suggest a better plan than that," the detective replied. "Where are you going, by-the-way?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular; I wasn't feeling very well, and I thought that if I took a good long walk before going to bed I would be able to sleep better."

"Yes, undoubtedly! Well, as you are not bound to any course suppose you take a walk with me to Police Headquarters and see the chief. If you explain the matter to him as you have to me I have no doubt he will be satisfied to take your word that you are leading a correct life now."

This proposition troubled the wily crook greatly.

On a previous occasion he had accepted an invitation to come to Police Headquarters for the purpose of having a friendly conversation with the superintendent, and the moment he got well inside the doors he was taken to a private room and searched; the result of this examination was the discovery of evidence which sent him on a trip to the "stone-house" up the river at famous Sing Sing.

Sharp suspected that if he accepted the detective's invitation a similar result would follow.

If he was searched the copper box would be found, then an inquiry would be made at the hospital and when the death of old Martin was discovered the chances were great that he would be accused of murdering the old Scotchman, and although he knew that it would be hard work to convict him of the crime, for he had been careful to pour what remained of the drugged liquor down the sink, yet he would have a deal of trouble to disprove the charge, and it was morally certain that he would be brought to book for stealing the copper box.

The crook became desperate; he saw the doors of Sing Sing Prison yawning wide before him, and he resolved to escape at all hazards.

A perfect master of the art of dissimulation, his face betrayed no signs of the thoughts which were in his mind.

He only hesitated for a few minutes before replying, just as if he was thinking the matter over, which was only natural under the circumstances.

Then he said, in a very humble way:

"All right! I am agreeable, I'm sure. I know the superintendent is a good, square man, and not the kind to put any obstacles in the way of a man who is trying to do what is right."

"Oh, yes; you are correct there. I have known him many a time give money right out of his own pocket to a man who had been on the 'cross,' but had resolved to act on the square."

"I ain't afraid but what the superintendent will do me justice," the crook declared. "And you can plainly see by my readiness to go with you that I am all right now, and honest in what I say, for if I wasn't the superintendent is about the last man in the world that I would like to face."

"You are right about that! If you are up to any crooked work you don't want to get the 'old man' after you."

"But will we find him at Headquarters at this late hour?"

"Yes; he has some important business on hand to-night, and will be in his office until one, or after."

"That is lucky, and it will not take him long to settle my business."

"Come along, then!"

Despite his long experience, the detective was deceived by the submission of the crook, and believed the man to be honest in his statements.

As he turned, though, Sharp took advantage of the opportunity to deal him a fearful blow.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT.

Down upon the head of the detective descended the life-preserver with tremendous force.

Fitzgerald threw up his hands, as though to ward off the blow, the motion performed instinctively, for his senses were reeling under the awful stroke, and then he sunk to the pavement as the ox sinks before the ax of the butcher.

The crook had freed himself from the detective, but before he could start to run up the street, as had been his intention after disposing of the detective, a tall, dark form glided from a doorway on the opposite side of the way.

The moment Sharp caught sight of the newcomer he suspected that it was a pal of Fitzgerald's, and that for some reason both sides of the street were guarded.

In this emergency the crook was quick to act. The appearance of the dark figure made him understand that there had been a witness to his attack on the detective, and Fitzgerald's pal had come with the idea of arresting him.

So the crook turned immediately and ran down the street at the top of his speed, hotly pursued by the new-comer.

When Sharp reached the river street he darted along it; he managed to reach a foundry yard into which he turned and sought concealment before his pursuer had come around the corner.

The neighborhood was a favorable one for the escape of a fugitive, for it abounded in manufacturing establishments which had yards with all sorts of old odds and ends stowed away in them.

As the crook had disappeared when the pursuer turned into the street it was not possible for him to decide as to just where the man had gone.

He came to a halt, listened attentively for a moment, shook his head as much as to say that he considered the chance of catching the fugitive an extremely doubtful one, then he turned and retraced his steps.

The man had come to a correct conclusion. For a single man to attempt to catch a fugitive, after he had once found shelter in one of the yards, was a hopeless task, indeed.

And after forming this opinion, the man returned to the assistance of the stricken detective.

The crook, upon getting into the yard, stole forward with the stealthy tread of a cat, passed through the first yard, and by means of a convenient hole in the fence, got into a second, and so he proceeded until he reached the end of the block, then passed into the cross-street, and up this he went, keeping a wary eye about him.

At the first street he turned, and so kept on until he had twisted and turned like a hunted hare; but not until he was a good dozen blocks away from the scene of his encounter with the detective did he breathe freely.

"There, I think I am out of danger now," he muttered, for the first time putting his thoughts into words.

"It was a precious narrow squeeze," he continued. "And if I did not have my life-preserver all ready, the detective would have given me the collar, sure!"

Then the crook fell to meditating over the situation.

"Things are in a mighty bad way now, and no mistake, he continued. The fly cop is sure to go to the hospital and inquire about me as soon as he gets over that clip that I gave him, so it will be safe to say that by morning this blessed town will be too hot to hold me."

Sharp shook his head in a disconsolate way.

"The meeting with that detective was about as hard a piece of ill luck as ever happened to me in any of the tricks I have worked."

"Now, everything will come out, and I must make myself scarce or I will be juggled, for just as soon as the fly cop is able to talk to the hospital people, they will have me dead to rights, so I must try the fly-by-night art as soon as I turn over the box and get my money, and anybody can bet all they are worth that I will be mighty glad to get rid of the infernal thing."

"There's no use talking about it, the box is hoodooed, for sure, and I shall not breathe freely until I get it out of my hands."

The crook had been proceeding at a good pace all the time he had been indulging in these meditations, and it did not take him long to reach the house where the Delmaynes resided.

The lateness of the hour did not trouble him any for he knew the habits of the people he sought well enough to understand that they seldom retired to rest until an hour or so after midnight, so he felt perfectly sure of finding them up.

He was not disappointed in regard to this, for

when he knocked at the door Delmayne himself answered the summons.

There were a half-a-dozen tenants in the house where the Delmaynes lived, so the front door was never locked, and therefore the crook had no difficulty in making his way to the rooms occupied by the Delmaynes.

"It is all right! I have done the trick!" Sharp answered as he entered the room.

The three in the apartment, Mr. and Mrs. Delmayne and the Westerner, Higgins, had been engaged in a sociable game of cards when the crook knocked at the door, and a joyful exclamation came from the lips of all of them when Sharp made the pleasing declaration.

"Got the box all right, hey?" Delmayne cried, pausing with his hand on the door-knob, having just closed the door while Sharp advanced with the air of a conqueror to the middle of the apartment.

"Well, now you can bet your bottom dollar that when I go in to do a job I am just the man to do the thing up brown, and no mistake!" the crook exclaimed.

"That is good!" Delmayne declared.

"Oh, I felt satisfied that if Sharp undertook the job he would make a success out of it!" Mrs. Delmayne asserted.

"If you have got the copper box we are all right!" Higgins exclaimed.

"It isn't every man that can pick up three hundred dollars so easily!" Delmayne remarked.

"That is true enough, but it takes head-work to put the trick through, you know," the crook remarked in a boastful way.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that, and if you hadn't got the head-piece to work the trick you would not be able to collar your little three hundred so easily," Delmayne observed.

"That is so! Well, now, old pal, just count out your mopuses and take the box!" Sharp exclaimed. "And I will be mighty glad to get rid of it too, I can tell you!" he continued.

Just as he finished the sentence the door was suddenly opened—it had been Delmayne's intention to lock it, for the crooks always kept the portal securely barred against intrusion, but in the flush of the rejoicing over the successful issue of the enterprise, the confidence man had neglected the precaution, so the intruder had no difficulty in securing admission.

Delmayne was thrown half-way across the room by the force of the shock; the others sprung to their feet in alarm, and they had reason for their action too, for in the doorway stood the detective, Joe Phenix, and behind him, were a couple of policemen.

Those within the room were dumfounded with the exception of Sharp.

He realized that he was in a trap and was quick to act.

As the detective and the policemen advanced into the apartment he lowered his head and made a sudden bolt for the door.

The detective and policemen tried to lay hold of him but he slipped through their hands in an eel-like fashion and managed to gain the stair down which he plunged at a breakneck rate of speed.

"You remain here, Jim, while Bob and I run this fellow down!" Joe Phenix commanded and then he and the second policeman gave chase to the wily crook.

Out into the street the fugitive ran, the officers following closely on his heels.

Sharp ran down the street, knowing that he would not stand any chance if he went up toward Broadway.

He turned the first corner, running at a great rate of speed.

His idea was to try the same tactics which resulted so successfully before, to twist and turn, doubling upon his track, so as to throw his pursuers off.

The moment the policeman reached the street he had given the alarm raps designed to put all his brother officers on the alert.

And as the crook ran for dear life, the distant alarm raps, as officer answered officer, came distinctly to his ear.

Apparently the blue-coats were gathering around so as to hem him in, and in turning a corner he fairly ran into the arms of a stalwart policeman.

The crook was prepared for just such an emergency.

He had his life-preserver in his hand, and when he encountered the policeman he essayed to fell the officer with it, but the blue-coat dodged the stroke, and in retaliation brought his own heavy "night stick" down upon the head of the crook with tremendous force.

The stroke beat Sharp to his knees.

Dazed by the blow, and really not conscious of what he was doing, the crook put his hand behind him as if to draw a weapon, but this he could not do for the leather club was the only weapon he possessed.

The policeman did not know this though, and feeling sure that the fugitive was going to pull a revolver on him, hit him another blow with the club, which knocked the crook senseless.

The copper box had indeed brought bad luck to him.

Having thus disposed of the fugitive, the policeman rapped for assistance.

In a few minutes Joe Phenix and the officers who had accompanied him in his pursuit of the crook arrived on the scene.

The policeman who had laid Sharp out recognized the great detective immediately.

"Ah, Mr. Phenix, are you after this fellow?" the officer exclaimed.

"Yes, he is my game, and I am glad that you succeeded in getting him," the detective replied.

"He showed fight and I had to lay him out," the blue-coat explained. "He tried to pull a pop on me, but I was too quick for him."

"He is a desperate rascal—wonderfully so for a sneak thief," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Oh, is that all he is?" asked the officer in a disappointed tone. "Why, from the way he showed fight, I made sure that he was a first-class bank-robber, or some other high-toby cracksmen."

"No, he is only a common sneak-thief, but he is a desperate fellow for all that," the detective replied. "And you did well not to take any chances with him," he added.

"Well, I judged from the way he went at me that he would make a tough fight if he got the chance, so I went in to take the steel out of him as soon as I could."

"You acted prudently," Joe Phenix remarked. "And now let me see what the fellow has on his person. Bob, while we search him, suppose you summon an ambulance, for I think the fellow is so badly used up that he will not be able to walk."

The policeman departed, while Joe Phenix and the other officer proceeded to search the crook.

"He ought to have a copper box in his possession," the detective remarked as the pair commenced the searching process.

"A copper box, eh?"

"Yes, that is what the fellow got away with, and is what I am after."

As the reader has probably suspected, the presence of the detective, Fitzgerald, in the neighborhood of the hospital, was no accident, but, on the contrary, was the result of a carefully-arranged plan, and the second man who had made his appearance on the other side of the street, after the crook had stricken down the detective, was Joe Phenix in person.

The master man-catcher had made a shrewd calculation.

The copper box was in the hospital, and as the gang which Mrs. Delmayne represented were evidently willing to commit even so great a crime as murder in order to get at the box, the detective came to the conclusion that it was extremely likely that some attempt would be made to steal the box from the hospital, so Joe Phenix took Fitzgerald into his confidence, and the two placed themselves on guard to watch the building.

When the crook made his appearance the pair thought it suspicious and when Fitzgerald recognized the sneak-thief he felt sure that Sharp had been up to some mischief, and this was why the detective wanted the crook to go with him to Headquarters.

His attack on, and escape from, Fitzgerald made Joe Phenix sure that the man had got at the box, for unless actuated by some powerful motive he would never have ventured on so bold a course.

Joe Phenix had not troubled himself to pursue the fugitive, for he did not think there was much chance of his being able to catch him, and then having Delmayne's address he thought he could rob the fugitive in the Bleeker street house, as he believed the crook would make his way there as speedily as possible.

The reader knows how accurately the detective had judged the course which matters would take.

He had surprised his man, just as he expected he would, and the chances were great that the crook had the copper box, for he had not had time to deliver it to any one.

Careful search was made and great was the detective's disappointment when the copper box failed to appear.

He was completely puzzled.

The only solution to the riddle was that the crook had handed over the box to the Delmaynes immediately upon entering their apartment, and as he had left an officer in charge of the people in the rooms, there was a good chance that he might be able to get hold of the box, that is, if the Delmaynes had not been sharp enough to hoodwink the policeman in some way so as to afford them an opportunity to conceal the plunder.

"I will soon know the truth!" Joe Phenix exclaimed as the ambulance came rattling along.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

As a rule Joe Phenix was not a man who was easily astonished. As the reader knows, who has followed the fortunes of this indefatigable man-hunter, as described in the tales of the Joe Phenix series, the veteran detective was much more of a philosopher than the most of men who

lay claim to being followers of the ancient sages, but on this occasion he was decidedly amazed when the search of the policemen failed to produce the copper box.

From the way the fellow had acted he felt certain that he had the box in his possession.

Unless he was engaged in some unlawful enterprise he would not have assaulted the detective, for shrewd and cunning men of his class are not apt to take a risk of that kind without there is a reason for it.

The desperate measures that the crook had taken to escape made the detective certain that the man had been up to some mischief, for otherwise he would not have cared whether he was brought before the superintendent of police or not.

And then, too, the fact that as soon as he succeeded in escaping from the detective he proceeded straight to the house of the Delmaynes seemed to be conclusive proof that he had managed to get hold of the mysterious copper box.

Joe Phenix had expected the crook to make just such a move, and after Sharp succeeded in making good his escape, the detective hastened to Police Headquarters, explained to the superintendent the circumstances of the case, and got two policemen to assist him in making the arrest, for the man-hunter anticipated that if he attempted to do the job single-handed, the crooks might, in their desperation, offer a stout resistance, and although he was a man who did not know the meaning of the word fear, yet in a case of this kind he always made it a rule to surprise his game, so it would be seen right at the beginning that it would be wisest to yield quietly.

"It is strange," the man-hunter remarked. "I confidently expected to find a peculiar copper box, and as it is a pretty good sized article, it does not seem possible that he could conceal it upon his person in such a way that you would not be able to find it."

Both of the policemen declared that they had made a careful search and as they were old hands at this sort of thing it did not appear to be probable that the crook could have concealed the copper box in such a way as to defy their search.

In order to satisfy himself on this point though the detective had another search made in which he took a leading part, but this was just as fruitless of results as the preceding one as far as the copper box was concerned.

"My calculation was faulty," Joe Phenix remarked. "Or else the fellow has been smart enough to suspect that we were after the copper box and managed to get rid of it either before I attempted to nab him or during the chase."

"Yes, he had plenty of chances to drop the box while he was running, of course," one of the policemen remarked. "He could have slung it into some dark corner, and no one would have been the wiser."

"That is true, but it does not seem probable to me that he would have adopted such a course," the detective remarked, thoughtfully. "The copper box is valuable undoubtedly or else these crooks would not be so eager to get it, for they did not hesitate at putting the life of a man in peril so as to get hold of it, and after this fellow once got it safely into his possession it does not seem possible that he would throw it away unless he was so hard pushed as to be satisfied that there wasn't any chance for him to escape, and that, it seems to me, was a conclusion he would not be apt to come to until the very last moment, and in this case he was nabbed so quickly that there wasn't much chance for him to work any such trick."

The policemen agreed that this conclusion seemed to be correct.

"Of course it is very probable that he would have rather thrown the box away than to let us capture it, but as I said, the odds are great that he would have delayed doing it until the last moment, hoping to be able to escape, and then he could not have done it without our catching on to him."

"To my thinking," the detective continued, after pausing for a moment, "he would have been certain to hold on to the box until the last moment unless during his flight he passed some place where he thought he could leave the box with very little chance that any one would find it until he could have an opportunity to go after it."

The policemen remarked that while this was possible yet they did not think that it was probable.

By this time the crook showed signs of returning consciousness.

He had been handcuffed, so there wasn't any danger of his getting away.

"I will cross-examine this rascal and see if I can get anything out of him," the detective remarked. "I can't say though that I have much hope of being able to accomplish anything, for he is a tough citizen and the chances are great that he will do all he can to baffle me."

"The only way to treat such rascals is to hammer sense into them with a club!" one of the policemen declared.

The crook rose to a sitting posture as his senses returned to him, and scowled in an extremely ugly way at his captors.

"Well, my man, I fancy that I have got you dead to rights this time," Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" Sharp replied, in a defiant way.

"Don't you?" the detective inquired, in a surprised tone.

"No, I don't!" the crook declared, still more angrily and defiantly. "What charge can you make against me? I haven't been doing anything."

"Is that so?" the detective asked, in an extremely sarcastic way.

"Yes, it is, and you know it, too!" the crook retorted. "If I have done anything why don't you say what it is right out?"

"Oh, you are an innocent duck! You are one of the kind of men who are always being persecuted by the police. If you have not been up to some mischief, why did you lay Fitzgerald out with your 'billy,' and then take to your heels?" the detective queried. "Men who have not done anything do not usually try tricks of that sort."

This speech showed the crook that his suspicion that the detective was the man who made his appearance on the other side of the street when he assaulted Fitzgerald was correct.

"To hit a fly-cop over the head ain't a hanging matter," Sharp growled.

"I did not say that it was, but I give you credit for being keen enough not to do such a thing without there was a good reason for it," Joe Phenix replied.

"Oh, I have had it in for Fitzgerald for some time, and when I saw a chance to lay him out I couldn't help going in for it," the crook explained, trying to appear as honest as possible.

Joe Phenix shook his head.

"No, no! don't try to pull the wool over my eyes with any such yarn as that," the detective remarked. "I know you well enough to understand that you would not be guilty of any such act of folly. You are no fool and you wouldn't do a thing of that kind for it would be the biggest kind of a mistake."

"You laid Fitzgerald out because you saw that he had made up his mind to take you to Headquarters and you had a good reason for not wanting to go there."

"That is all bosh!" the crook declared in a sulky way. "What difference did it make to me whether I went to Headquarters or not?"

"You believed that if you went to Headquarters you would be searched and the copper box which you stole from the hospital would be discovered."

Sharp was decidedly astonished as he listened to this speech for he had no idea that the detective was so well posted, but he was too cunning a rogue to allow his captors to see that he was at all surprised, and he stared in a stupid way in Joe Phenix's face, exclaiming:

"Oh, come off! what rot are you giving me now about a copper box—what are you driving at anyway?"

"Old man, you are caught dead to rights, as I told you in the first place, and you might as well make a clean breast of it first as last," the detective declared, sternly.

"You think you are smart!" the crook rejoined. "You are trying to catch me in some trap, but you can't do it!"

"Don't you make any mistake about that," the detective remarked. "I know all about this game that you and the Delmaynes have been trying to work, and you can bet all the money you will ever be apt to get hold of that I have spoilt it!"

"I don't know anything about any game!" the crook replied sullenly.

"Oh, yes you do!" Joe Phenix exclaimed firmly. "And I know all about it too. I know that this man who now lies on the bed of death in the hospital, Spotted Tom Murphy, was tracked clear from the mining-camp in the far West to New York City by a party who was anxious to get at a certain copper box which the man carried."

"Murphy was waylaid and assaulted in Thirteenth street so that he could be robbed of the box; the Delmaynes were at the bottom of that trick, but I happened to come along just in time to spoil the game; then, when the man was carried to the hospital, Mrs. Delmayne—Slippery Nell—proved her right to that name by making a bold move to get hold of the box, but as I was on the spot, and happened to know her, although she had no suspicion that I was a detective, I blocked the game again."

"Then you came in and undertook to gain by cunning what the Delmayne gang had failed to win by force, but as I anticipated that some move of the kind would be made I was on the watch, set a trap and caught you in it without any difficulty."

"I have gone to the trouble of making this explanation so you will comprehend just how matters stand, and if you are one-half as smart as I take you to be, you will see that the best thing for you to do will be to make as good terms with me as you can."

The crook was extremely disgusted as he listened to this plain statement of the case, but he had command enough over his features to prevent his captors from discovering his feelings by the expression of his face.

He saw that he was in a tight place, but was not inclined to make terms with the detective even to get out of it.

"Oh, you are away off!" he exclaimed. "I don't know anything about any copper box, and I want you to understand that you have made a big mistake in thinking that I do."

"I thought I nabbed you before you had time to turn the box over to the Delmaynes, but as you haven't got it I suppose I am wrong in my surmise, unless you threw the box away while you were running," Joe Phenix remarked, shrewdly.

"Certainly—of course! That was just the kind of game I played!" the crook exclaimed in an extremely sarcastic way. "You have got the thing down fine this time, and no mistake! All you have to do, you know, is to go and search in the gutters and you will be sure to find the box somewhere, maybe!"

And then the fellow stuck his tongue in his cheek and grinned in the face of the detective.

Joe Phenix saw that it would be useless to waste time in talking to the man and so contented himself with remarking:

"You will find that you have made a big mistake in not making a clean breast of it, for I shall do my best to make it warm for you."

"It is my idea that you will not be able to do half as much as you think for!" the crook retorted.

This ended the conversation, for Joe Phenix was not the man to bandy words with such a rascal.

CHAPTER XV. ON THE TRACK.

THE officers conveyed their prisoner to Police Headquarters, where he was again searched, but with no better results than on the previous occasions, then he was placed in a cell, preparatory to being conveyed to the city prison, the famous Tomb, in the morning.

Joe Phenix was a man who believed in striking when the iron was hot, so he hunted up a police justice, rousing the man from his slumbers, and got a search-warrant, empowering him to make an examination of the Delmayne apartments, also warrants for the arrest of the parties.

As he came from the house of the magistrate, he encountered Fitzgerald, who had sought for him at the Police Headquarters, and not finding him there had followed on his track.

The detective had received an ugly crack on the head, but he was not the man to allow a little thing like that to bother him much, and after he recovered from the effects of the shock he had proceeded to the hospital to make an examination, while Joe Phenix went to work to capture the fugitive.

Fitzgerald was now in possession of all the facts in the case, and he related how, when he had roused the hospital people from their slumbers, and upon explaining the nature of his business, an examination was made which resulted in the discovery of the steward's death and the absence of the copper box.

"What did the doctors think about the steward's death—was it due to natural causes or violence?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Of course the examination was a hasty one, but it was their impression that the man died a natural death."

"It was my idea that this crook was not the man to run his head into a noose," Joe Phenix observed. "He probably made the discovery that the steward was dead, and took advantage of the circumstance to steal the copper box."

"That was the conclusion that the hospital men came to," Fitzgerald remarked.

"There is no doubt now that this crook had the copper box in his possession when he left the hospital, and that was the reason he made such a desperate attempt to escape from you when you overhauled him," Joe Phenix observed, thoughtfully. "And now the question is, what the deuce has the rascal done with the box. He did not have it when we captured him, and as I feel sure that he carried it away from the hospital, the conclusion is plain that he either gave the box to the Delmaynes before I nabbed him or else he threw it away during his flight, and it does not seem likely either that he would do that, for by such a course he put it out of his power to make a stake, which was certainly his object, or else he would not have become mixed up in the matter at all."

"It is a mighty puzzling case!" Fitzgerald declared.

"Yes, you are right, but if we stick to it the chances are that we will be able to get at the truth in the long run," Joe Phenix observed.

"Our game now is to get at the Delmaynes as soon as possible," he continued. "I left a couple of officers in charge of the premises so that if the box is there the crooks will not have any chance to get away with it before I return."

"That was a wise precaution," Fitzgerald observed.

Then the two set out for the abode of the crooks.

When they arrived at the apartments in Bleeker street they found the Delmaynes engaged in a hot argument with the two officers in regard to the legality of their proceeding.

"This is all dead wrong, you know!" Delmayne exclaimed as the pair entered the apartment. "If you understood anything about the law you ought to know that you haven't any right to come into a man's house without you have a warrant, and if I choose to kick up a disturbance about this matter I could make it mighty hot for you. You know that is the truth, don't you?" the crook said in conclusion, appealing to the detective.

"It may be that this proceeding has been a little irregular," the detective remarked. "But there is an old saying that the end justifies the means, and in a case like this it certainly fits in splendidly."

"Oh, yes, it is all very well to talk that way, but it is a mighty high-handed proceeding all the same!" Delmayne exclaimed, indignantly. "And if it wasn't for the fact that we have been unlucky enough to get in trouble two or three times, you wouldn't have dared to try it on."

"And there comes in another old adage, you know, 'Give a dog a bad name and hang him,'" the detective remarked, with a quiet smile.

"That is about the size of it, and it is an infernal outrage," the crook declared.

"It does not make any particular difference," Mrs. Delmayne took occasion to observe at this point. "So, Richard, there really isn't any use of your getting excited or angry over the matter. We have not committed any crime, and therefore have no reason to be afraid."

"How about this little game of yours to get possession of the copper box?" Joe Phenix asked.

"I did not tell you anything but the truth about the matter," Mrs. Delmayne replied, affecting an air of injured innocence. "And when I talked to you at the hospital, Mr. Phenix, I hadn't any suspicion that you were not one of the doctors attached to the institution; the idea that you were a detective never entered my mind. You see, Mr. Phenix, great as is your renown as a detective officer, you were unknown to me, and so I was not on my guard, but spoke in the freest and frankest manner."

"The copper box is my property. Mr. Murphy is an old friend of mine, and brought the box all the way from the West on purpose to give it to me, and just as soon as he recovers possession of his senses he will tell you that I have not spoken anything but the truth."

Joe Phenix shook his head. "Oh, I don't suppose you believe me!" the woman exclaimed. "Under the circumstances it is very natural that you should not, but I am telling you the truth all the same."

"Unfortunately for you, Mrs. Delmayne, the wounded man has been able to speak and he says in the most decided manner that he does not know anything about you; he was bringing the box to a young lady who lives in Thirteenth street, and he was on his way to give her the box when he was assaulted."

This plain statement did not disconcert the woman in the least. She was too old a stager to be taken at a disadvantage.

She shook her head, heaved a deep sigh and assumed a mournful air.

"Ah, it is plainly to be seen that poor Tom is not in his right mind or else he would never have made any such statement as that!" she declared. "He may have talked sensibly enough, but you can depend upon it, Mr. Phenix, that he did not know what he was saying, for if he had, he never would have made a statement of that kind."

"Mrs. Delmayne, you are only wasting your breath!" Joe Phenix declared. "You have worked this game in a scientific manner, but luck is against you and there is no chance for you to win."

"Of course you know all about the matter and it would be foolish for me to attempt to argue the case with you!" the woman declared with mock humility, but there was an ugly look in her eyes.

"Yes, that is the truth, and I am glad to see that you comprehend that it is so," the detective answered, just as if he believed that the woman meant what she said.

"As I told you, Mr. Murphy was able to tell his story, and after I heard it, it was not a difficult matter for me to make a shrewd guess at the game that you and your confederates were trying to play."

"The copper box contained valuables, and Murphy had been tracked clear from the West by some man who knew all about the box and was eager to get hold of it."

At this point the detective allowed his eyes to rest on the face of the Westerner, much to the alarm of that individual, and although he did his best to conceal the feeling he could not help betraying that he was troubled.

He understood that his appearance indicated that he was from the West and the inference was plain that the detective suspected he was the man who did the tracking.

"The man who followed Murphy from the West made arrangements with your crowd to help him get the box; the assault on Murphy in Thirteenth street was the result of that deal, but although you laid the man out you did not get the box for I happened to come along just in the nick of time; it was extremely odd that of all

men in the world I should chance to be the one to come along and spoil your game," and the detective glanced in a meaning way at Delmayne and the Westerner, much to the annoyance of the two.

"Oh, you needn't look at us!" Delmayne exclaimed. "We hadn't anything to do with it!"

"I am sorry that I have not sufficient confidence in your word to accept that statement as the exact truth," Joe Phenix remarked in his calm, methodical way. "But you see men in my line of business get to be so suspicious that we become firm believers in the truth of the Prophet Solomon's declarations that all men are liars."

"Well, I am giving it to you straight anyhow!" Delmayne declared in a sullen way.

"I might take more stock in that statement if I had not had the luck to capture your pal, Sharp, who stole the copper box out of the hospital for you," the detective remarked.

This did not take the crooks by surprise, for they had calculated that the chances were good that Sharp would not succeed in escaping.

"You are coming the old detective's game now, I see," Mr. Delmayne remarked, scornfully. "You think you can get a confession out of us by pretending that Sharp has weakened, but the trick will not work, and you are not half so cunning as you think you are! Sharp is no fool, and if he had been up to any crooked work he would not be idiot enough to give it away."

"He wouldn't be the first man by a long shot who has split on his pals in order to save himself," the detective observed.

"It does not matter to us what he has said!" Mrs. Delmayne declared. "We do not know anything about the matter and if he stole the copper box out of the hospital that does not prove that we had anything to do with the affair."

"That is true!" Delmayne added. "And you must see, Phenix, as a man of sense, that it would be nonsense for you to attempt to hold us on account of what Sharp has done."

"Oh, you are all in the same boat and I do not think I will have any difficulty in proving it when the time comes," Joe Phenix replied. "The only object that Sharp had in stealing the copper box was so that he could sell it to you, for the box wouldn't be of any use to him."

"What good would it be to us?" Mrs. Delmayne demanded.

"Ah, now you are asking a riddle which is too much for me," the detective replied. "Not until I find out what the box contains will I be able to answer that question, but that the box is valuable to you there is no doubt, or else you would not have risked putting a halter around your necks to get hold of it. I suppose you understand that Murphy is in a very bad way, and the chances are great that he will die of his injuries."

"Well, Phenix, if you can prove that we are the men who did the job you could undoubtedly cause us a deal of trouble, but I am willing to bet big money that you cannot do anything of the kind!" Delmayne asserted in the most confident way.

"That remains to be seen," the detective replied. "You may be smart enough to get out of the scrape, and then again you may not be. Anyhow I have warrants of arrest for you and this Westerner on the charge of assault with intent to kill, and if you will have the kindness to hold up your hands I will snap the bracelets on."

"How is it that you came to leave me out, Mrs. Phenix?" Mr. Delmayne asked in a mocking tone. "Don't you believe that I assaulted the man too?"

"Oh, no, that is out of your line," Joe Phenix replied. "I have a search-warrant here though," and the detective drew the paper from his pocket as he spoke.

"A search warrant!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed.

"Yes, I am after the copper box, and if I find it here I will take you into custody without going to the trouble of getting out a warrant."

"Oh, that is all right!" the woman exclaimed, scornfully. "If I am never arrested until you find the copper box in these rooms it will be a long time before I face a magistrate."

The crooks did not know exactly what to make of the situation.

When Joe Phenix said he had captured Sharp they did not doubt that he spoke the truth, and they were much astonished when it became apparent that he had not got hold of the copper box; but when they pondered over the matter they came to the conclusion that either the detective had deceived them when he said Sharp had been taken, else that individual had been keen enough to get rid of the copper box during his flight.

Anyhow it was apparent that the detective's triumph was a barren one.

The pair took their arrest calmly enough, for they were old hands at the business and understood how difficult it would be for any one to prove that they had anything to do with the assault on the stranger in Thirteenth street.

They knew that Murphy could not identify them even if he recovered from his injuries.

sufficiently to be able to appear in court, and though it was Joe Phenix in person who had scared them away from their victim he had not got near enough to make out who they were, and the Delmaynes knew the detective well enough to understand that even though he felt positive in his own mind that Dick Delmayne and the Westerner were the parties who had done the job yet he was not the man to go upon the witness stand and swear that he recognized them if he had not done so.

The handcuffs were placed upon the pair and then Phenix and the officers proceeded to search the apartments.

The detective took occasion to ask one of the policemen if any one of the three had made any suspicious movement during his absence.

The man replied in the negative.

None of them had left the room and so if the copper box was in their possession no opportunity had been afforded them to conceal it.

The search was a fruitless one; no trace of the article could be found.

Mrs. Delmayne laughed in the face of the detective.

"Clever as you undoubtedly are, Mr. Phenix, you cannot accomplish impossibilities!" she declared. "You cannot find what we have not got, no matter how closely you search."

This speech made Joe Phenix suspect that the woman had the copper box concealed upon her person, and he indicated as much to her.

"Oh, no, you are altogether wrong!" she replied. "And as you are the kind of man whom I would rather have as a friend than a foe, I will tell you what I will do. Get a carriage and I will go with you to Headquarters and there you can have the matron search me to her heart's content."

The detective promptly accepted the offer, for he fancied the woman was trying a bit of bluff, but when the search was made no copper box was found.

In spite of all his skill and experience the acute detective was baffled completely, and the only reasonable explanation of the mystery was that Sharp had thrown away the box in his flight.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER THE SPELL.

As the Delmaynes had anticipated, the evidence against the two men was so weak that when an examination was made the able criminal lawyer that Dick Delmayne employed easily succeeded in convincing the magistrate, before whom the proceedings came, that it would be a piece of gross injustice to hold his clients upon such flimsy proof, and so they were discharged.

Sharp was not so lucky; the justice thought that the prosecution had established a case, and he was held to answer.

All that the lawyer was able to do for him was to get the crook admitted to bail, and two thousand dollars was the sum fixed upon.

The magistrate fancied that when he put the bail at such a figure the crook would not be able to procure it, and so would be obliged to remain in jail.

But Joe Phenix knew better. He was well acquainted with the Delmayne gang, and understood how they did business.

At the back of all such gangs are wealthy men, the "fences"—receivers of stolen goods, who find the money for the gang, and in turn get the greater part of the plunder, and when the crook gets into difficulties, through the aid of these backers it is always an easy matter for the arrested men to obtain bail.

Joe Phenix was not disappointed at being unable to make out a strong case against the prisoners, for he had no hopes of doing anything of the kind when he arrested them.

As the keen-witted Slippery Nell had declared, it was all a game of bluff; the detective made the arrest upon very scanty proof, trusting that he would be able to obtain more, either through forcing some one of the prisoners into a confession, or finding something upon their persons to show that that they had been concerned in the assault.

As the reader knows, the bloodhound was disappointed, but he was not discouraged, for he was one of the men who believed that "everything comes to him who waits," and he had faith that although the affair was a complete puzzle at present, the solution of the mystery would come in time.

When Sharp was arraigned in court he looked like a badly used-up man.

The policeman had not been particularly careful in regard to the degree of force which he had used.

The crook showed a disposition to make an especially ugly fight, and the blue-coat had gone in to "do him up" as quickly as possible.

When Sharp was committed to the Tombs, the doctor attached to the institution wished to make an examination of his injuries, but the crook was in an ugly mood and resented the interference of the medical man.

It wasn't anything, he said. Just a little clip on the head, and he was no kid to mind a little

thing like that. He had tied up his head himself and he was all right.

Sharp was so ugly and disagreeable about the matter that the doctor did not persist, although he told the crook that he judged from his appearance that he was pretty badly hurt.

Sharp retorted that he knew better, and the doctor, losing patience, told him plainly that he was an ungrateful cur, and that if he had any trouble with his wounds he would not have anybody to blame but himself.

The crook laughed at this warning, and remarked that he thought doctors were a lot of frauds, anyway.

After his release on bail, Sharp went with the Delmaynes, who offered to make room for him in their apartments, and upon his arrival there felt so badly that he was compelled to take to his bed.

Mrs. Delmayne had seized upon a favorable occasion to speak to the crook about the copper box.

"It is all right!" he replied. "This Phenix is a sly fox, but he isn't the only man in the world who is up to snuff. I have the box in a place where I can put my hands on it whenever I want to, and when this thing has blown over I will fix the matter up with you. No need to worry about the matter, you know, for the box is perfectly safe for a year in the place I put it."

Mrs. Delmayne saw from the way in which he spoke that he was not inclined to be communicative and so she did not say anything more.

The condition of the crook steadily grew worse and the Delmaynes, becoming alarmed, sent for a doctor, although Sharp protested that there wasn't any use of their doing anything of the kind.

But when the medical gentleman arrived he submitted to the examination, and the result was that the doctor declared the patient's skull was fractured, and, furthermore, said it was his opinion Sharp had not many hours of life.

The Delmaynes did not know exactly what to do under the circumstances.

The doctor had not said to the patient himself that his condition was dangerous, but consulted the Delmaynes upon the matter.

"An operation will have to be performed," he declared. "It ought to have been done immediately after the hurt was received, but as the wound has been neglected the chances are about ten to one that it will not be successful; in fact I hardly think the man has one chance in ten for his life."

Now the Delmaynes cared not a straw whether Sharp lived or died, but they were terribly anxious to get hold of the copper box, and so they told the doctor that it was their opinion the truth ought not to be concealed from the wounded man.

He ought to understand that his condition was dangerous and make needful preparations for death.

"Well, I think myself that in a case of this kind the man ought to know what is before him," the doctor remarked. "He seems to be a pretty self-willed, ugly sort of fellow anyway, and the chances are that he will take the news bravely enough."

And this proved to be the case.

At first Sharp was rather inclined to doubt the truth of the doctor's assertion.

"I've got a tough old head!" he declared. "And it don't seem likely that a few licks with a club would be apt to crack my skull!"

"It was not the club that did the mischief, to my thinking," the medical man replied. "When you were knocked down your head came in contact with the pavement, probably with the sharp edge of the curbstone, and that did the business."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," the crook remarked, evidently growing more feeble.

Then the doctor said that the quicker the operation was performed the better, and that as he required help, he would summon some of his medical brethren and get to work as soon as possible.

After the doctor's departure the Delmaynes essayed to console the injured man, for it was evident that he felt extremely low-spirited.

"Cheer up, old man!" exclaimed Dick Delmayne. "You are going to pull through all right, and are worth a dozen dead men."

"Oh, yes, these doctors always take a gloomy view," Mrs. Delmayne asserted. "I have known many a man given up by them who recovered all right."

"That may be, but I am afraid my goose is cooked!" Sharp declared in a melancholy way.

"Oh, no, 'cheer up, Sam; never let your spirits go down!" quoted Dick Delmayne.

"Yes, you want to brace up and have some style about you!" Higgins exclaimed.

"Never say die!" Mrs. Delmayne ejaculated.

"Oh, that is all very well, but I am hoodooed!" the crook declared.

This announcement greatly surprised the others.

"How on earth do you make that out?" Dick Delmayne exclaimed.

"It is that blamed copper box!" Sharp answered.

"The copper box!" Mrs. Delmayne cried.

"Yes, it has thrown a spell over me. The

cursed thing is unlucky!" Sharp replied, speaking like a man who was firmly convinced of the truth of what he was saying.

"What on earth put that idea into your head?" Mrs. Delmayne asked, in amazement, while Dick Delmayne and the Westerner looked at each other with eyes full of wonder.

"Can't you see for yourself that the cursed copper box is hoodooed?" Sharp demanded, in an angry way.

"No; I cannot!" Mrs. Delmayne replied.

"How do you make it out?"

"How did the box come to New York?" the crook asked.

"This Westerner, Murphy, brought it," the woman answered.

"Exactly, and where is Murphy now?"

"In the hospital," responded Mrs. Delmayne slowly, beginning to see the point.

"Yes, stretched on his back with a fractured skull, and the doctors say that he will be lucky if he lives twenty-four hours more."

"That was an accident, and it might have happened to him if he had never seen any copper box," Mrs. Delmayne argued.

"Yes, that is true, but he had the box in his possession when he was hurt, and you know well enough that if it had not been for the box he would not have been slugged."

"That is true enough," Dick Delmayne admitted. "There is no getting around that fact; it was his having the box which got him into the trouble."

"After he was hurt he was lugged off to the hospital, and the box placed in charge of the hospital steward, an old Scotchman named Martin; now, do any of you know anything about Martin?"

The others shook their heads.

"Well, he is dead—died within twenty-four hours after the box was placed in his care!"

"That proves nothing—the man might have died anyway," Mrs. Delmayne remarked, but there was a serious look upon her face.

"Oh, no; it was the box hoodooed him, and no mistake!" Sharp declared.

"Now, let me show you just how it was."

And then he related how in order to get possession of the copper box he had dosed the Scotchman.

"Do you see? the odds are big that if I had not played the knocker-out on him that the man would be alive now," the crook asserted.

"Well, I never knew a dose of that kind to kill anybody," Dick Delmayne asserted. "And there is not a day in the week either that the knocker-out is not used here in New York, but you never hear of any one dying from the effects of the drug."

"That is just it!" Sharp exclaimed. "Mebbe old Martin wouldn't have died if he had not been hoodooed by the box."

"Oh, I think that is all nonsense!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed, yet there was a serious, almost anxious look on her face as she spoke.

"Not a bit of it! It is fate as sure as you are born!" the crook exclaimed in a tone full of conviction. "The copper box brought bad luck to Murphy, then old Martin got hold of it and it laid him out. I had been watching how the thing was working, but like you I reckon there wasn't anything in it, and I tried my luck. You wanted the box and was willing to pay a good price for it, and I thought I would be a fool not to go for the chucks; the result is that I have got my ticket for soup and no mistake!"

The others looked at each other, all three were considerably impressed by the recital, yet unwilling to believe there was truth in the crook's notion that the copper box carried ill luck with it.

"This is nothing more or less than a coincidence!" Mrs. Delmayne declared. "I, for one, am not superstitious enough to believe that the possession of the copper box is fatal to the holder."

"Nor I!" Dick Delmayne declared. "And if you will give us the tip, so we can get hold of the box, you can depend upon it that we will not be afraid to try our luck."

"You can risk it if you want to, of course," Sharp remarked. "It does not make any difference to me, for I am out of the game. I will give you the tip all right, and all I want you to do is to see that I am decently buried after this thing is over; don't let the cursed doctors cut me up."

"Don't you worry about that!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "If you do not pull through all right, we will see that you have as fine a funeral as any man could wish."

"Oh, I don't care so much for that; all I am anxious about is that the cursed saw-bones shall not get a chance at me."

"I give you my word that nothing of that kind shall happen!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed.

"And you know me of old, Mat; you know I can be trusted to keep my word."

"Oh, yes, that is all right! I never knew you to go back on a pal, and you always go in for a square deal," Sharp observed.

"Yes, that is the kind of man I am," the confidence king declared.

"When I saw that Joe Phenix had me hunted down, I made up my mind to give him a race

for his money, although I hadn't much hope of getting away, for as it was not possible for me to get much of a start, the odds were big that I would not be able to give the cops the slip."

"It was a bold move," Mrs. Delmayne commented.

"The main reason why I made the break was to get a chance to get rid of the copper box, for it went clear against my grain to let Phenix get hold of it," the crook explained.

"I knew that there wasn't one chance in a hundred that I would be able to give the cops the slip; but it was my notion I could stow the box away somewhere, and I did it, too," and despite the pain he felt the crook chuckled as he reflected upon how neatly he had baffled the indefatigable bloodhound.

"You got rid of the box in your flight?" Mrs. Delmayne observed.

"Yes."

"But it seems to me that it was a rather risky proceeding," the woman continued, thoughtfully. "How can you tell but what some one would find the box?"

"Oh, no, I put it in a safe place enough," the crook replied with another chuckle. "I stowed it away in a hiding-place where there is not the slightest danger of any one finding it."

The confident assertion puzzled the hearers and they looked at Sharp as though they had doubts in regard to his statement.

"It is a fact!" the crook persisted. "I know what I am talking about, and you need not look at me as though you thought that I was away off my base. I am not that kind of man. I have not lived a crooked life for years without being up to all the tricks that are going, and I knew of a hiding-place where I could drop the copper box without any danger of its being discovered by the keenest fly-cop that ever snapped the bracelets on a prisoner!"

An idea came to the quick-witted confidence queen.

"I comprehend what you did!" she exclaimed. "You dropped the copper box down a sewer hole!"

"That is the game I played!" the crook responded with another chuckle. "And even if the detective had been sharp enough to have guessed what I had done with the box, after he had caught me and found that I did not have it, it would have puzzled him to find out just where I dropped it."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," said Sharp.

The articles were furnished him.

With considerable difficulty the crook traced a sentence upon the paper.

"There's the direction," he observed. "I know the spot well; the manhole is loose so it can be easily lifted, and I've often thought that it would be a sweet place to stow a swag away that couldn't be hurt by water!"

Then the crook chuckled again, and his head fell back on the pillow.

In five minutes he was dead.

The three watched the death-struggle with alarmed eyes.

Was the copper box indeed hoodooed?

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

As soon as the three recovered from the surprise occasioned by the sudden death of the unlucky crook, they fell to discussing the situation.

"Well, we are going to get the box after all," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"Yes, and in spite of Joe Phenix, who has taken so much trouble to interfere with our plans," Mrs. Delmayne observed.

"That man is a regular devil," the Westerner declared. "And if I had him out in Arizona I would be mighty apt to put a knife in him in such a way that he would not be of much use to himself or anybody else after the operation."

Delmayne laughed in a particularly knowing way.

"My dear friend Higgins, if you attempted to try a game of that kind on this detective, the chances are big that before you got through you would find that you had caught the biggest kind of a tartar," the confidence man asserted. "You see, I know the man well and so understand what I am talking about."

"Yes, it is the truth," Mrs. Delmayne remarked.

"Joe Phenix is one of the kind of men that you want to steer clear of if you possibly can. We have succeeded in getting the best of him in this business, and we may consider ourselves very lucky indeed."

"Yes, and we must take care that he does not get on our track again," Dick Delmayne observed.

"We must be very cautious in our movements," the women added. "He is certain now that Sharp managed to steal the box out of the hospital, but of course it is not possible for him to guess what Sharp did with it. When he finds out that Sharp is dead though, he will be certain to suspect that we know where the box is, and will be pretty sure to have us shadowed, so it is my opinion that we ought to go for the box as soon as possible."

"Yes, that is true," Dick Delmayne observed in a thoughtful way. Then he read the sentence which the crook had written upon the paper over carefully.

"Let me see," he continued. "It is only four blocks away to the spot and if I mistake not it is in Sullivan's beat."

"And Sullivan is crooked too!" Mr. Delmayne exclaimed.

"Exactly! that was just what I was thinking about," the husband replied. "We can make an arrangement with him so that we can go down in the sewer without any trouble."

"You will try to work the game in the daytime?" Mrs. Delmayne asked, thoughtfully.

"That was my idea: Higgins and myself coming up like sewer laborers, have a ladder and rope and descend through the man-hole just as if something was out of order and we had been instructed to fix it."

"That is a good idea, and I do not see any reason why the scheme will not work!" the woman exclaimed.

"Oh, it will go through, sure!" Higgins cried.

"The only thing we must be on our guard against is that this infernal detective does not shadow us!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed.

"We must take such precautions that he will be baffled if he tries anything of the kind, the woman observed.

"If we are on our guard it is not likely that he will be able to shadow us," the husband remarked. "It is not an easy job to dog men who are on the watch for shadows, and I defy the most expert bloodhound in the city to track me if I am prepared for a game of that kind."

"Oh, now that we are on our guard it will not be an easy matter for even so great a detective as Joe Phenix to catch us napping," Mrs. Delmayne asserted.

Then the three proceeded to debate how the matter had best be arranged, and it was resolved to make the attempt on the following day, and Delmayne said he would see Sullivan that night and square the matter with him.

The confidence man carried out that part of the programme without any trouble, and bright and early next morning, just as the city clocks pointed to the hour of seven, Dick Delmayne and Higgins, dressed like working men, in dirty "overalls," and bearing with them a short ladder, some ropes, a lantern, and a small crowbar with which to pry up the iron cover of the man-hole, made their appearance at the corner of the street where Sharp had declared he dropped the copper box down the sewer.

It was a small side street, few people were in the neighborhood, and none of them deemed it worth while to trouble their heads about the supposed sewer workmen.

The pair proceeded in a very business-like way.

They lit the lantern and then pried off the cover of the manhole.

This was an easy job and soon accomplished. Then the ladder was lowered into the sewer and the two men descended, Dick Delmayne in the advance with the lantern in his hand.

This particular point was only two blocks from Broadway and the sewer was a large one, high enough to permit of a man standing upright in it, but the amount of sewage passing through it was small, so that when the rays of the lantern illuminated the darkness it would have been an easy matter for the searchers to discover an object as big as the copper box if it was there, but it was not.

The pair could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes as they flashed the lantern around and found that nothing that at all resembled the copper box met their gaze.

"It ought to be right at the bottom of the manhole!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed, perplexed by the absence of the box.

"It might have rolled a little distance away," the Westerner suggested.

Then the two hunted up and down the sewer for fifty feet in both directions, but not the slightest trace could they find of the copper box.

"We are clean beat!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed at last in despair.

"Well, if this ain't the most mysterious thing that I ever struck in all my born days you can take my head for a football!" Higgins cried.

"Sharp must have made some mistake about the matter," Dick Delmayne remarked. "Instead of dropping the box at this corner he dropped it at some other."

The Westerner pondered over the matter for a minute and then he shook his head in a thoughtful way.

"If that is so our cake is all dough then," he remarked in a very disconsolate way.

"Well, it certainly looks as if we were going to be beat," Dick Delmayne declared.

"Sure that you didn't make any mistake about the corner?"

"Not a mistake!" the other answered, decidedly. "And for proof here is the direction, and you can see for yourself that we have struck the right corner."

Then Dick Delmayne drew the scrap of paper, upon which Sharp had written, from his pocket and the two examined it by the aid of the lantern.

The statement of the confidence man was correct.

They were at the corner indicated by the crook.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it," the Westerner remarked.

"There is only one explanation possible as far as I can see," Dick Delmayne observed. "Sharp made a mistake. He thought that he dropped the copper box down this sewer hole when in reality he dropped it at some other corner."

"The mistake was natural under the circumstances, you know," the confidence man continued. "Sharp was running for dear life with the police hot at his heels, and as he dashed around a corner he slung the box down the sewer hole; he thought that it was this particular corner, but in the darkness he made a mistake and that is what has upset the game."

"Yes, I reckon you are about right," Higgins remarked, shaking his head in a gloomy way.

"Well, what can we do?" he asked with a blank look on his countenance.

"I will be hanged if I can suggest anything!" Dick Delmayne replied. "We are clean beat, and that is all there is to it!"

"I don't suppose that it is possible for us to discover in any way the particular corner where Sharp really did drop the box," the Westerner remarked.

"No, I don't see how we could manage to do it," Dick Delmayne replied, after thinking over the matter for a moment. "In the first place I haven't any idea of the course that Sharp took when he attempted to give the detectives the slip, and if I did know I don't see how it would help the matter any, for the only way to discover the precise point at which the box was dropped would be to examine the sewer at all the corners that he passed during his flight, and that couldn't be done, you know, for if we went into the business in that wholesale way we would be sure to attract the attention of the police and then all the fat would be in the fire."

"Yes, that is so; we could not work the game in that way."

"No, the only thing for us to do is to give up beat. This Sharp by his cursed smartness has upset the whole thing, and that is the way these extra smart chaps generally contrive to do."

"We have made a thorough search, I think," Higgins remarked, looking around with an expression upon his face as though he had some doubts as to whether this was the truth or not.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!" Dick Delmayne asserted. "There isn't an inch of the sewer for fifty feet in all directions that we have not examined, and it would not be possible, you know, for the box to roll that far away."

"That is so," Higgins asserted, slowly. "Well, I suppose that we will have to give it up as a bad job, although it seems to be mighty tough after all the trouble we have had."

"Yes, that is true, but I don't see what else we can do. The box isn't here, and I know of no way by which we can find out just where it is."

"Sharp was an extra knowing fellow, too, and it seems mighty funny to me that he should make any mistake of this kind," the Westerner observed, with a longing look around as though he was reluctant to give up the search.

"It is just as I said a while ago; it is the extra smart fellows who make stupid blunders of this kind," the crook rejoined.

"Say! I don't suppose that it is possible that he did drop the box at this place and some one came in ahead of us and secured it?"

"Oh, no; that is stretching the probabilities!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "No one ever goes into these sewers but the regular workmen to make repairs, and there are no signs that any one has been in here lately."

"That is so," the Westerner coincided, after taking a careful look around. "I suppose we may as well give it up as a bad job, but, I swear, I don't think I ever felt more disappointed about a thing in my life!"

"A man must not expect to win every game, you know," the other remarked, with the air of a philosopher. "We have made a slip up on this speculation, and that is all there is to it."

"Yes, it is a pity! It is a fortune gone right out of our hands."

"Better luck next time!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "But there's no use of our staying here; the dog is dead as far as we are concerned."

"No doubt about it—more the pity!"

Then Dick Delmayne ascended the ladder, his companion followed, and after they drew the ladder up they replaced the cover of the manhole.

Then, as they turned to pick up their tools to depart, from the grocery store on the corner came Joe Phenix, followed by the detective, Fitzgerald.

"Been hard at work, eh, boys?" the detective remarked in his quiet, pleasant way, while the astonished pair stared at him in amazement.

An oath was on Dick Delmayne's lips, but he choked it back, forced a laugh and exclaimed:

"Well, you have managed to come a little surprise party on us!"

"Yes; and I will have to admit that you have put me to considerable trouble, too," the detective remarked. "You kept such a deuced good lookout for yourself that I was put to my trumps to shadow you without your being aware of what was going on."

"I suspected, of course, that you would be on the lookout for something of the kind, and so I used extra precautions," the bloodhound continued.

"Oh, no; you are dead wrong!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed, in a light and airy way, concealing with marvelous skill the anger which burned within his breast. "I hadn't any idea that you would trouble your head about me—why should I get such a notion? I beat you in the law case without any trouble, and I imagined, of course, that would end the matter."

The detective shook his head.

"Oh, no, Dick; do not try to deceive me with any yarn of that kind," Joe Phenix remarked. "I know you too well to believe that you could possibly make any mistake of that sort. The court business was but a skirmish, and although you got the best of it, it did not settle the contest between us."

"The copper box is the prize that we both are after, and until you get fairly away with it, or I succeed in capturing it, the struggle must keep on."

"Now I know perfectly well that Mat Sharp stole the copper box from the hospital, and I know, too, that he managed to hide it away, and when I heard this morning that he was dead I jumped immediately to the conclusion that he had intrusted the secret of the whereabouts of the box to you, and that you would be likely to go after the treasure as soon as possible, so it was extremely necessary that I should keep my eye upon you."

"You have argued the thing out pretty well, but it is my opinion that you will discover you have made some big mistakes before you get through!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed, with an air of bravado.

"I am only a man and liable to make mistakes, of course," Joe Phenix remarked, placidly. "But I did not make any mistake when I planned this trap, for it has succeeded admirably, as you must admit."

"Well, you tracked me all right—no doubt about that—but what good will it do you?" the crook exclaimed, defiantly.

"You have been after the copper box," Joe Phenix said with the tone of a man who felt certain that he was speaking the truth. "I suspected that Sharp had dropped the box down a sewer-hole when I discovered, after his capture, that he did not have it, but I did not worry my head about the matter, for I was satisfied that if I kept quiet and shadowed you, that in good time you would lead me to the box."

"I think you will find that you have made a mistake in that calculation," Dick Delmayne declared, with an arrogant laugh.

Joe Phenix surveyed the confidence man for a moment, and slightly elevated his eyebrows.

"What is the matter? Couldn't you find the box? Did Sharp make a mistake in regard to the particular corner, or are you trying a big game of bluff, with the hope of deceiving me?"

"Oh, you ask so many questions that you make me tired!" the crook exclaimed. "And then I never was a good hand at answering riddles anyway."

"I think I will have to trouble you to go with me to Headquarters," the detective said.

"All right. I haven't any objection, but you will have your labor for your pains!" Dick Delmayne declared.

Then the pair were conducted to Police Headquarters, and there carefully searched.

On the way Delmayne tried to get rid of the slip of paper, but he was too carefully watched, so that it was found on him.

"This is the direction, of course, and as you did not get the box, I presume that Sharp made a mistake," Joe Phenix observed. "I will try my luck as a searcher, and have every sewer-hole that the fellow passed in his flight examined."

And the detective was as good as his word, but no copper box could be found.

It had disappeared as mysteriously as though it had melted into thin air.

Seldom in his career had the bloodhound been thus baffled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRANSPLANTS.

In the side streets west of Broadway, in the neighborhood of Bleecker, there is a large settlement of Frenchmen, and so many of the sons and daughters of Gaul have located there that it is commonly termed the French quarter.

Small restaurants and saloons abound and to one of these, a dingy place situated in a basement, but bearing the high-sounding title Hotel de France, we will now introduce the reader.

It was a saloon and restaurant combined after the French fashion.

The proprietor of the place was a fat, overgrown Frenchman with a bewhiskered face which strongly suggested an old, gray rat.

He was familiarly known to his patrons as Papa Perrichon.

The clock on the wall showed that the hour of ten was at hand.

Business was not brisk, there being only three customers, playing dominoes and drinking cheap French wine, at a table in the rear part of the saloon at the time we introduce the Hotel de France to the notice of our readers.

Papa Perrichon himself sat at a table near the door, smoking a pipe.

Whether business was good or bad troubled the fat Frenchman but little, for he kept the place more for amusement than for any profit.

The Gaul was one of the heroes of the Commune, and before he came to the surface as a leader of the people was noted for being one of the most daring and successful rascals that Paris had ever known.

Being gifted with an oily tongue and an imposing presence, Papa Perrichon managed to cut quite a dash during the stormy time when Paris trembled under the rule of the red flag men.

By the aid of skillful management Papa Perrichon contrived to get into the finance department and when the Commune sunk amid fire and blood he was lucky enough to escape to America carrying a goodly store of money with him. Here, in order to amuse himself, he opened the Hotel de France, where he managed to make a living if nothing more.

The night on which we write was the one on which Sharp sat down with the Scotchman, Martin, to enjoy the drinking bout which ended so disastrously for the old steward.

As the old Frenchman pulled away at his pipe a middle-aged man, rather shabbily dressed, made his appearance and took a seat by the proprietor.

The new-comer had a cruel, hawk-like face, and a good judge of mankind would have set him down as being no better than he ought to be at the first glance, and yet he was a rather showy, dashy-looking fellow with a grand air.

He had only recently arrived in New York, having been obliged to leave the old world in haste, the police being hot on his track.

Victor Le Marc he called himself, an adventurer of the first water, and commonly called by his associates "The Marquis" on account of the way in which he usually carried himself.

The Marquis and Papa Perrichon were old acquaintances and had done considerable business together in the old time before the fat Frenchman managed to help himself to the Commune funds.

According to the police belief, Papa Perrichon now was nothing but a "fence," and his so-called hotel a house of call for foreign rascals of all degrees, but the old fellow managed his business so shrewdly—if the report was true—that the detectives were never able to trace any crime home to him.

"Well, my tulip, what luck did you have to-night?" Papa Perrichon asked as the Marquis sent himself at the table.

Le Marc had been on an excursion in search of prey. Being an expert card-sharp and an extra good billiard player it was his custom to entice guileless youths into playing with him so that he could fleece them of their money.

"I couldn't do any business to-night," the French sharper replied in a disgusted way.

"The kids are beginning to know me, and even if I pick up a stranger some one is sure to drop him a hint that he stands no chance with me."

"Ah, that is always the way!" Papa Perrichon declared. "There is a host of busybodies in this world who can't attend to their own affairs but must poke their nose in other people's business."

"Then the room-keepers too have got their eyes on me," the sharper remarked. "At these places to-night I was politely, but emphatically, told that my room was better than my company. Peste! if this was Paris I should have invited some of the gentlemen to take a quiet walk with me in order to find out whether they could handle a sword as well as myself."

"Ah, there isn't anything of that kind in this country!" the old, fat Frenchman exclaimed with a sigh. "There is nothing here but John Bull fisticuffs."

"Yes, and that is something that I do not know anything about. With the sword I do not fear any man but when it comes to fighting with fists I am a gentleman and not used to any such vulgar, brutal business."

"You think that game is about up then?" Papa Perrichon remarked, reflectively.

"Yes, I am afraid that it is, and I shall have to look out for something else."

"Ah, well, to a man like yourself—a man of good parts and possessed of the fire of genius, there is always an open door. If one shuts, another will open."

"Very true! I have fought the world ever since I was old enough to look out for myself and I have never suffered for food or drink yet!" the Marquis declared in a boastful way.

"Oh, you will get along all right, my tulip! There is not a doubt of it," the host remarked.

Then a man descended from the street into the restaurant and interrupted the conversation.

The new-comer was an undersized fellow, poorly dressed and with an evil-looking face.

As he entered the saloon he looked around with the air of a man who was not familiar with the premises, then he fixed his glittering black eyes upon the pair at the table, made a polite bow and said:

"If I mistake not it is Papa Perrichon I see?"

"That is my name," the host replied, surveying the stranger closely.

"And do you not recognize me, Papa?" the stranger exclaimed, with a grin, helping himself to a chair and sitting down by the table.

"Your face certainly seems to me familiar," the old man said.

"I have changed a deal in the last ten years, and it is just about that length of time since we met," the stranger remarked. "I was with you, *mon brave*, in the days of the Commune, and like you, when the end came I helped myself to all the cash I could get hold of, and fled to America. You came to New York, while I went to New Orleans, but I am not able to boast that I have prospered as well as you appear to have done," and the speaker cast an admiring glance around him as he finished.

"I thought I knew you," the host observed. "You are Louis Durell."

"Otherwise known as the Ratcatcher," the other responded, with a grin.

And then the two shook hands warmly.

"Have you never met Monsieur Le Marc, here, possibly better known as the Marquis?" Papa Perrichon asked.

"Never, but the gentleman is well known to me by reputation," the Ratcatcher answered, and then he shook hands with the hawk-faced Frenchman.

"I judged from what you said that you did not prosper in New Orleans," Papa Perrichon remarked.

"It is my own fault. I am too fond of the gaming-table," the Ratcatcher replied, shrugging his shoulders like a true Gaul. "If I win a rich prize I am sure to lose it at cards or dice. I could do well enough in the South, but I had the ill-luck to get into trouble. I am quick to use the knife, you know, when my blood is up, and when I see that I am being robbed, I am just the kind of man to both show my teeth and use them."

"Ah, yes, that is natural," the host observed.

"Well, no doubt you can manage to make a living here. There is good picking for a man like yourself in New York if you are only careful and do your work well."

"Oh, I am a master at my trade!" the Ratcatcher boasted. "But I need a pal. It is hard for one man to do business," and he looked inquiringly at the Marquis as he spoke.

Le Marc understood the meaning of the look.

"I shall be pleased to join Monsieur Durell," he observed. "I have no associates and I agree with him that it is not possible for any big jobs to be done by a man working single-handed."

"You understand, my braves, that if you succeed in making a big haul, I have friends who will pay you as good a price for the stuff as you will be able to get anywhere," Papa Perrichon declared.

"Oh, yes, your fame in that line has traveled as far as New Orleans," the Ratcatcher asserted.

"And that was one reason why I came directly to you upon arriving in the city. I thought there was a chance that I might meet some one here with whom I could work. I knew, you know, that the moment I introduced myself you would remember me and understand that I was a man who could be trusted."

"Yes, yes, you are true blue! No doubt of that!" the host declared.

"You and the Marquis will make a fine pair and ought to be able to win some good prizes," Papa Perrichon continued.

"Oh, yes, we will take the tricks if we have any kind of luck," the Ratcatcher asserted.

"Two such braves as you ought to do well," the host remarked. "Both of you are a little off in feather but that can be easily fixed. I will advance you some money to-morrow and you must get new suits; then you must go to the big up-town hotel and see if you cannot pick up some young blood with plenty of money. You must contrive to get him down here and I will give you a private room up-stairs. You wish to treat him to some choice French wine—some of your own importations and such as cannot be got from any wine-store in this country. The wine is doctored, you understand, and when the man sleeps you help yourselves to his money."

All three chuckled merrily as the old man finished.

"It is a fine game!" the Ratcatcher asserted.

"Yes, it is one that is easily played too," he continued.

"It might be possible to for you infants to get hold of a countryman, a stranger to the city, with plenty of cash and valuable jewelry," and the old rascal sunk his voice almost to a whisper at this point.

"Yes, yes, it would be what these Americans call a picnic!" the Ratcatcher declared.

"And at such a picnic, men like the Ratcatcher and myself would be sure to enjoy ourselves," the Marquis observed.

"Oh, yes, and if the stranger fell into so deep a sleep that he could not be waked, from a closet in the room a passage leads to the sewer and the man could be tumbled down there and the rats would soon make short work of him," the host remarked.

"A passage leading to the sewer, eh?" the Ratcatcher remarked, rubbing his hands briskly together as though he was very favorably impressed with the idea.

"Yes, this is a very old house—a hundred years old, maybe," Papa Perrichon said. "One of the oldest in this section, and the sewer which leads through this street is an ancient one too," the host explained. "Once upon a time there was a well in the cellar under the closet and when the sewer was built it struck the well and drained it and the careless workmen did not take the trouble to wall up the well, so from the closet you can get into the well and from the well into the sewer."

"Ah, yes, I see, quite an idea," the Marquis observed.

"I have an idea!" the Ratcatcher cried, abruptly.

"Well, *mon brave*, do not hesitate to speak it. Let us know what it is," Papa Perrichon said, while the Marquis fixed his eyes inquiringly on the face of the other.

"It is very simple!" the rat-catcher exclaimed, with one of the grimaces of which he was so fond.

"It should be a good idea then, for good ideas are always simple," the host remarked, with the air of a philosopher.

"Yes, yes, that is very true," the Marquis assented.

"I know something about sewers, you know," the Ratcatcher remarked.

"Yes, in the days of your youth in the sewers of Paris you trapped your rats, which you sold to the English mylords, who used them to exercise their dogs," the host remarked. "Many young Frenchmen who liked to ape the Englishmen also had rat-killing dogs."

"Very true. Well, I grew used to the sewers so I was as much at home in them as ordinary men are in the street," the Ratcatcher explained.

"Yes, yes, a true Frenchman can become accustomed to anything!" Papa Perrichon declared, with a patronizing nod.

"In my wandering through the sewers I often found many valuable articles, money, jewelry—and I remember on one occasion I found a diamond ring which I sold for five hundred francs!" the Ratcatcher declared.

The Marquis drew a long breath.

"Ah, what a lucky stroke it would be if we could find a jewel like that now!" he cried.

"Yes, yes, indeed!" Papa Perrichon assented, taking the greatest interest in the conversation.

"I fancy, Ratcatcher, that you are situated about the same as myself," the Marquis continued. "By the bones of my grandfather I swear I can scarcely produce two coins to rub together. My pocketbook is as these Englishmen say—the elephant has walked over it."

"I am just as badly off," the Ratcatcher replied. "I scarcely have money enough in my pocket to buy a meal."

"It is a bad state of affairs, my infants!" the old saloon-keeper declared, with a solemn shake of the head. "But with men of metal like yourselves it cannot last long. You will soon wring a stake from Fortune, fickle dame as she is."

"I propose that we try the sewers!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed. "In Paris it is now a regular business, you know. These sewers are carefully examined for valuables, but in this new country no one would think of doing anything of the kind."

"Very true, and I have no doubt that if you two try the sewers, you will make a good thing out of it," Papa Perrichon asserted, with an air as though he had given the subject much grave attention.

"What do you say, Marquis—will you try it?" the Ratcatcher asked.

"Yes; even if we do not succeed in finding any valuables, the expedition will not do us any harm," Le Marc replied.

"We will descend into the sewer, then!" the Ratcatcher cried.

"Yes, I am with you."

"How soon?" Durell asked.

"Oh, as soon as you like; the quicker the better, I should say," the Marquis replied.

"Yes, that is right, my braves; there is nothing like striking when the iron is hot!" Papa Perrichon declared.

So it was settled that the two should descend into the sewer as soon as they could prepare for the adventure.

The landlord provided some old clothes which the pair put on, then he hunted up a couple of lanterns and conducted the pals to the room from whence the passage led into the sewer.

By means of a short ladder the two descended into the dark pit.

"Good luck go with you, my infants!" Papa Perrichon cried, as the men went down into the

gloomy hole. "May you be fortunate enough to find a bushel of diamonds!"

The adventurers laughed, and their merriment sounded like the echoes from another world coming up from the underground passage.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY.

THE Ratcatcher led the way, for as he observed to the Marquis:

"This is no new thing to me; I am used to this sort of business, so I will go in advance."

"Yes, it will be best for I know nothing at all about business of this kind," the Marquis replied.

The Ratcatcher after getting well into the sewer was considerably astonished and disappointed in regard to it.

"Oh, this is not at all like the sewers under the city of Paris!" he declared. "These Americans are great people, but these sewers are not to be compared to the ones in France."

"I know nothing about the matter, but this passage is most certainly a vile place!" the Marquis exclaimed in deep disgust.

"It is far inferior to the sewers of Paris, but when we get to Broadway we may find that the main sewer is better."

The Ratcatcher had planned to proceed directly to Broadway, believing that the chances for finding valuables would be better under the main street of the metropolis.

It was a disagreeable search and the Marquis was heartily sick and disgusted with the task before he had been ten minutes in the sewer, but his companion, more used to such adventures, did not pay so much heed to the vile surroundings, although he did not hesitate to swear fluently at the cursed Americans because they made such a frightful bad job of their sewer-building.

For a good three hours the pair wandered through the dark, underground passages, and greatly to the disappointment of the pair but little booty did they find.

A dozen times at least though they had imagined that they saw a diamond sparkling in the mud only to discover upon examination that it was but a bit of glass.

At last they resolved to give up the search.

"I am disappointed!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed. "These sewers are not like the sewers of Paris and we are only wasting time in looking for valuables."

"Yes, that is true, and he might as well get out as soon as possible," the Marquis remarked. "The vile place has fairly made me sick."

"Oh, it isn't anything when you get used to it," the other replied. "But you are right about getting out. We might as well, for there is not much to be picked up. These Americans must be very careful with their valuables or else there would be greater pickings for us."

"Yes, certainly we have not secured enough to pay us for the trouble that we have taken," the Marquis observed.

"We must keep a sharp lookout; we may be more lucky on our return," the Ratcatcher observed.

This anticipation was not realized and the pair turned from the main sewer into the side one without having added a dollar's worth of valuables to their store.

"This has been a complete failure!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed as they slowly made their way toward the point where they had entered the underground passage.

"This is my first experience in this sort of thing, and I can assure you that it will be my last!" the Marquis declared.

Then to the ears of the two came a sound which caused them both to halt and peer anxiously ahead into the darkness.

"What was that?" exclaimed the Ratcatcher.

"It sounded as though some metallic substance had been thrown down into the sewer," the Marquis replied.

"No small article either, judging from the noise it made when it struck the bottom of the sewer," the other observed.

"We must keep our eyes open so as to discover what it is," said the Marquis as the onward march was again resumed.

As the reader has doubtless anticipated it was the copper box, thrown into the sewer by the fugitive crook, which had made the noise attracting the attention of the Frenchmen.

Fifty paces further on the two discovered the copper box and their wonder was excited by its strange appearance.

"It is a box, apparently," the Ratcatcher said. "It is not solid; one can easily tell that by its weight, but I don't see any way to open it."

Then the Marquis made a careful examination of the article.

"Yes, you are right; it is a sort of a box, and it is a puzzle how to open it, but a hammer and chisel will soon settle the question."

"Perhaps we have secured a prize after all," the Ratcatcher suggested, but made the suggestion more as a joke than because he believed there was any truth in it.

"Yes, it may be so, but to my thinking it is very doubtful," the Marquis remarked,

Then the two went on their way, and in twenty minutes more were climbing the ladder, which had afforded them access to the sewer.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT THE BOX CONTAINED.

THE old Frenchman was on the lookout for the return of the adventurers.

He had a table spread in the room with a couple of bottles of wine and a luncheon.

"Aha, my braves, you have returned!" he exclaimed, as they climbed the ladder. "It was my calculation that you would soon be here, and as I thought you would be both hungry and thirsty, I got something ready for you."

"Your clothes are in the bath-room yonder," and Papa Perrichon pointed to a door on the opposite side of the room. "Take a wash and dress, then fall to at the table."

"Aha! what have you there?" the old man exclaimed, abruptly, as he caught sight of the odd-looking copper box, which the Ratcatcher carried under his arm.

"That is more than I can say," the other replied. "It appears to be a box, but we have not been able to open it, and so can't say what it contains. It may be a prize, but the chances are that it is not."

"It will not take us long to find out all about it after we get at the matter," Papa Perrichon remarked.

Then the two took a bath and resumed their own clothes again, and while this operation was going on the old Frenchman endeavored to solve the secret of the box, but he was not able to open it.

"There is a secret spring I presume, but it is too much for me, my infants; I am not able to find it."

The two adventurers attacked the wine and disposed of one of the bottles in no time.

"Now, then, Papa Perrichon, if you will get us a hammer and chisel we will soon see what the box contains," the Ratcatcher exclaimed.

The tools were brought, and the Ratcatcher was about to commence operations on the box when the Marquis, who had been examining it closely, cried out:

"Stop a minute! It seems to me that there is a slight depression at one end here, just as if it had been worn by the pressure of a finger—see!" and as the speaker pressed the ball of his thumb firmly on the place the cover of the box flew open.

The Marquis had discovered the secret spring. The three peered eagerly into the box, and were disappointed to find that all it contained was a single carefully-folded paper.

"Well, well, this isn't much of a treasure-box after all!" the old Frenchman exclaimed, in a disappointed tone.

"No, we have had our trouble for nothing!" the Ratcatcher coincided.

"Don't be so hasty in coming to a conclusion," the Marquis observed. "The paper may be valuable. If it was not, it does not seem to me as if any one would take the trouble to put it up in a box like this."

"Yes, yes, there may be something in that," the old Frenchman observed, with a wise nod.

Then the Marquis unfolded the paper and glanced over it, while the others watched him.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, after he had read a dozen lines or so, "my surmise was correct; this is indeed a most valuable find!"

"Is that true?" asked the Ratcatcher, eagerly. "Well, I must say that I am glad of it. I have had a pretty long run of bad luck and it is about time that it changed."

"It is a long lane that has no turning," Papa Perrichon observed. "That is an English proverb, you know, and it is a very good one."

"I will read it aloud so you can both see what it amounts to," the Marquis said.

"To my daughter, VIOLET GRAHAME:—"

"I, your long absent father, James Grahame, now pen these lines."

"No doubt you have long believed I was dead and sleeping far away in an unmarked grave. It is true that I have been dead to you for years, and you have never enjoyed the love and protection which a father ought to give to his child."

"Now that I am standing on the verge of the grave—now that I know my days are numbered and I can hardly hope that the Dread Reaper will spare me for many hours, I am conscious that I have not treated either you or your unfortunate mother, Margaret, as I ought to have done. I will not attempt to excuse my action. I was from boyhood wild and reckless, impatient of restraint, and married life, instead of taming my roving spirit, seemed to increase it."

"I deserted your mother and came to the West, where, under a false name, I expected to make a gigantic fortune, and at last, just as the shadow of the grave is falling upon me, I have succeeded."

"Here in the Mogollon Mountains, near the wild mining-camp which for the last few years has been my home, I have discovered one of the richest gold mines that the eyes of a mortal ever rested upon."

"Aha! this is growing extremely interesting

now!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully together.

"Upon my word, now, it was a lucky chance which put the idea into my head to try the sewer. But for that notion we would not have found this wonderful copper box and this amazing document."

"It was a rare stroke of good luck, truly," the old Frenchman remarked. "And you may thank your fortunate stars that the idea came to you."

"Ah, well, I have had my ups and downs of course, but like a cat I generally manage to land upon my feet!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed in a boastful way.

"Go on, my brave, and let us hear the rest of this interesting document," Papa Perrichon remarked.

"From the indications I believe it to be one of the famous lost mines, the stories of which are so common in the West," said the Marquis, continuing the reading of the document. "The claim has indirectly been worked at some remote period and the deposit is of such a nature that a man with a common knife can dig the virgin gold from the seams of the rocks."

"Ah, doesn't that make a man's mouth water!" the Ratcatcher cried, unable to keep quiet.

"Yes, yes, it is more interesting than the finest romance. *Peste!* what a lucky find!" the old Frenchman declared.

"From the appearance of the mine it looks as if it had been originally worked by the Indians, for the gold is deposited in such masses that it can be easily taken out, already with my simple tools I have secured thousands of dollars worth of the precious metal, which I have concealed near the mine, waiting for an opportunity to send it away."

"I am so situated that I am obliged to use the utmost caution in approaching and departing from my wonderful find, for I live in as rough and rude a town as can be found anywhere in the West—Crazy Camp it is called, and the majority of the inhabitants are as great scoundrels as ever this world saw."

"If it were known that I had discovered the lost mine, the ruffians would not hesitate to rob me of the property even though they had to murder me to accomplish their object, and I am in daily dread that my secret may be discovered."

"There is a tradition, originating among the Indians it is said, that one of the lost mines brings bad luck to whoever has anything to do with it. I do not know, of course, whether it is my mine which possesses such a baleful influence or not, but one thing is certain, in this mine I have received my death."

"Yes, in a hollow which seemed as though it had been made by the rude tools of the red-men, I found the strange copper box in which I inclose this paper. It was open, so I could perceive the secret spring, and from the looks of it, I should say that it had been fashioned by one of the Priests of the Sun, the rulers of the ancient race which inhabited this land long before any European had set foot on the soil of the New World."

"Such peculiar copper vessels were used to hold the sacred spices burnt upon the altars, and the red-skins had a superstitious dread in regard to touching them, as they believed that they brought bad luck to whoever handles them!"

"Oh, what nonsense!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed, contemptuously. "How can anybody believe such trash?"

The speaker was a thorough socialist, who did not believe in much of anything, and therefore it was no wonder that he scoffed at the simple superstition of the savages.

"Oh, these wicked heathen will believe anything!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"It is but natural, you know; how should they understand that what all these priests say amounts to nothing?" he continued.

"Whether it is the mine or the copper box, I know not," the Marquis continued, reading from the paper, "but one thing is sure, I now lie on the bed of death, and my hurt is due to a most unaccountable accident. As I descended the rocks coming from the mine, my feet slipped, I fell, and in falling inflicted a fatal injury on myself."

"Upon my word, this was a strange circumstance!" the old Frenchman exclaimed.

"Neither the copper box nor the mine had anything to do with it!" the Ratcatcher declared in a dogged way. "It was an accident, pure and simple."

"Oh, yes, an accident," Papa Perrichon observed. "Still it was strange it should happen so."

"What good does it do to discuss the matter?" the Marquis exclaimed. "We cannot decide it either one way or the other and it seems to me that we are only wasting time in talking about it."

"That is certainly true," Papa Perrichon remarked. "We cannot settle the question."

"But it is all bosh about the box bringing bad luck," the Ratcatcher observed in an obstinate way. "And if the writer of this paper had not been weakened by the near approach of death he would not have given heed to such nonsense."

"Our friend here is a true prophet of the age of reason!" Papa Perrichon exclaimed with a laugh. "He has not forgot the teaching of the men of the Commune."

"I never trouble my head about such matters," the Marquis observed. "What good does it do for any one to worry their brains about such a subject. But in regard to luck it is all nonsense for any one to declare that there is no such thing as good or bad luck, for there is, and any man who goes through the world with his eyes open must admit it too."

"Come, Ratcatcher, you are a gambler—do you not have lucky and unlucky days?"

"Oh, yes, I will admit that when it comes to cards and dice there is such a thing as luck," the other said a little reluctantly, for he saw that he was getting the worst of the argument. "But it doesn't follow that a thing like this copper box can bring either good or bad luck in its train."

"You are illogical, my infant!" Papa Perrichon declared. "If it can exist in one case it certainly can in the other. *Peste!* I have known a dozen gamblers in my time who believed they possessed lucky talismans, this, that or the other thing, and these were hard-headed men too, who were not the kind of braves to give way to any nonsense."

"I never met a gambler yet who was not more or less superstitious!" the Marquis observed. "And some of the most successful men in that line whom I have known were not only firm believers in lucky things but in unlucky ones also, and I recalled one particularly brilliant man in that line, Crillion, the Coachman, he was called—"

"Yes, yes, I knew him!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed. "He was the very king of gamblers."

"Very true! Well, Crillion believed that it was the very luckiest thing in the world for him to meet a hunchback when on his way to gamble, and I know that he would have gone a mile out of his way to encounter one of these double-backs, and then after the hunchback had passed he would make believe to be brushing some dust from his coat, then if the man looked to be poor, he always tried to get him to take a piece of money; if he succeeded in this he went on his way rejoicing, for he felt sure that good fortune would attend all his adventures that day."

"Yes, yes, I was well acquainted with Crillion," Papa Perrichon remarked. "And as the Ratcatcher said, he was a very king among gamblers. He was just a firm believer in bad luck as in good, and while he thought it was lucky for him to encounter a hunchback, he dreaded above all things to meet a man who squinted, and if he had the misfortune to meet a cross-eyed man while on his way to the gambling-room, he immediately turned about and hunted up a hunchback, thinking he could only remove the spell which the cross-eyed man had thrown upon him by rubbing his hand on the hunch of Master Crooked-back."

"Yes, I know that that is the truth," the Marquis remarked.

"Bah! what does this prove?" the Ratcatcher cried, impatiently. "It only goes to show that for all his greatness as a gambler, that the coachman was a little weak in the upper story in this particular—what these Americans would call a crank. It is all nonsense, I tell you. I will admit that when I gamble I am weak enough sometimes to allow myself to be influenced by these superstitious, but I know well enough in my heart that it is all rubbish, and I ought to be ashamed of myself for giving way to such nonsense!"

"The Ratcatcher is a true man of the people!" Papa Perrichon declared, with a grin. "He has advanced to that point when he does not believe in anybody or anything. But suppose you go on with the reader. As far as I can see it does not matter to us whether the copper box brings luck or otherwise. We are only interested in the contents and care nothing for the box."

"One thing, though, seems to me to be pretty certain about the matter," he added, "and that is, both of you were in luck to come across the box, and no amount of argument will disprove that fact."

"Well, I suppose that that is true enough," the Ratcatcher admitted, a little unwillingly it must be said.

"I will go on," the Marquis observed, and then he resumed the reading.

"And now, with the shadow of death hanging over me, my mind goes back to the wife and child that I deserted years ago, and I am moved to make some reparation, tardy though it be, so I have written down the story of my discovery of the lost mine, and, after putting it in the copper box, will intrust it to the care of a faithful friend who will bring it to you. This friend, honest Tom Murphy, is the only man that I know of in this region whom I dare to trust. I have told him that I have made a valuable dis-

covery, and asked him if he would take the particulars to you after death claims me; the honest fellow has given me his word that he will do so, and I feel sure I can depend upon him to faithfully execute the mission. I will write full instructions, so that you will not have any difficulty in finding the secret spot, where I have deposited the gold which I have taken from the mine, and with the gold is a map, so you can easily locate the mine itself."

"After getting possession of the gold, you will be in a position to lay claim to the mine. You will probably have trouble about the matter, for the majority of the Crazy Camp men are a set of scoundrels, who would do anything for money."

"At Flagstaff, which is the nearest town and the point where the stage line starts which runs to Crazy Camp, you will find a lawyer and claim agent named Peter Elterham—Long Pete, the miners usually call him. Put your case in his hands; he is an honest man and you can rely upon his seeing justice done you."

"He will raise an armed force large enough to prevent any of the Crazy Camp scoundrels from attempting to jump your claim, which they would be certain to do if they thought they stood any chance to win by using violence."

"Now for the hiding-place of my treasure. Through Crazy Camp flows a small creek, one of the head-waters of the Little Colorado River; follow the creek up into the mountains until you come to where a second creek runs into the first in a little grassy valley; in the valley is a white dome-shaped rock; get three pines in a line with the rock and twenty paces from the third pine at a right angle is the spot."

"I have repeated this direction to Murphy and instructed him that if anything happened to the copper box—if through any accident he should lose it, or it should be stolen from him, he is to bring you to the mountain valley and proceed according to directions; but this I think is really unnecessary caution, for there is hardly a doubt about his delivering the box into your hands all right, for he is a most faithful fellow."

"My dear child, try to think as well of your father as possible, although I am aware that I have not treated you as a father ought to treat a child, but by this last act I hope to make some atonement."

"Is that all?" the Ratcatcher asked eagerly when the Marquis stopped.

"Yes, nothing more excepting that the man's signature is attached, James Grahame," the Marquis replied.

"Ah, my infants, we are in for a good thing, there is no doubt about that!" Papa Perrichon observed, gleefully. And this I call a nice piece of luck in spite of the Ratcatcher's opinion."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE THIEVES FALL OUT.

"WELL, there isn't any use of disputing about the matter," the Ratcatcher observed, in a sulky way. "I have my opinion, and I will hold to it too in spite of all that both of you can say!"

"I know you of old, Ratcatcher; you were always a regular mule for obstinacy!" the host declared.

"You had better not call me names unless you wish to make trouble!" the Ratcatcher replied, angrily. "If you know me as well as you pretend you ought to understand that I am not a man to be trifled with. I have always been able to hold my own wherever I have been, and no one, two or a dozen men can walk over me!"

"Oh, be reasonable, and do not talk nonsense!" the Marquis exclaimed. "No one wants to walk over you!"

"Well, I am not so sure about that, but I will not have it, anyway!" the other retorted.

During the reading of the document the Ratcatcher had been paying diligent attention to the wine and had managed to drink the better part of the two bottles, for Papa Perrichon had been so interested in listening to the reading that he had only moistened his lips with the wine half a dozen times; but the Ratcatcher had drank freely, and now it was apparent that he had a rather weak head, and the wine had affected it.

"We must not quarrel over a trifle," the host said, in a conciliating manner.

But the Ratcatcher was a low-minded brute, and had drunk just liquor enough to make him ugly and he had got the idea into his mind that his vaporings had made an impression upon his associates, which was not the case, for both Papa Perrichon and the Marquis were clear-headed, resolute fellows who seldom talked much about what they intended to do, but when the time for action came they were men who did not remain in the background.

"Oh, that is all right!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed, in a blustering way. "I am not the man to quarrel with anybody, but I want you both to understand that I can take care of myself, so be warned and don't try any nonsense."

"Neither Papa Perrichon or myself are men who are inclined to indulge in anything of the kind," the Marquis replied, a little nettled by the blustering and offensive manner of the

quia observed. "But what a fool he was to carry that slip around in his pocket. If by any chance he had fallen under suspicion and been arrested at any time, that slip of paper might have been the means of bringing him to the gal-lows."

"Yes—yes, every time; but, my infant, don't you know that common, vulgar rascals like this Ratcatcher are doing stupid things of this kind all the time!" Papa Perrichon declared. "And that is the reason why the police are able to nail them. It is not the detectives who catch them, but it is the blundering rascals catch themselves."

"I believe you are right; I have often heard of such pieces of stupidity."

"Oh, these common rascals are always blundering. But lend a hand, my brave, and we will put this dead scoundrel where the dogs will not be able to get at him."

The Marquis readily assisted, and it did not take the two long to transfer the body to the sewer.

"Exeunt the Ratcatcher." Papa Perrichon exclaimed, as he arranged the secret trap door in the bottom of the closet after his companion had passed into the room.

"Well, there is one less to divide the treasure with," the Marquis remarked with a grim smile as he resumed his seat at the table and filled out a glass of wine, which he swallowed at a draught.

"Yes, that is true," and as he spoke Papa Perrichon also resumed his seat at the table, and helped himself to a glass of wine.

"Now then, this affair is between us two," he continued. "And we must put our heads together, and see what is the best way to arrange the matter."

"It is something so altogether out of our line," the Marquis observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, yes, and we must put on our thinking-caps," the host declared.

"I know nothing whatever about the country, and so really am at a loss to decide how we had best proceed."

"By the way, come to think of it, it is odd that the Ratcatcher should have happened to get his ticket for soup in this affair!" Papa Perrichon observed, abruptly.

"How so?"

"You remember how he laughed at the idea that this copper box could bring ill luck to any one?"

"Yes, he did."

"But the copper box was the cause of the quarrel which brought death to him," the host declared.

"Yes, you are right," the Marquis remarked, looking askance at the odd-shaped article.

"We must be careful that the box does not bring us bad luck, too," Papa Perrichon observed, but he smiled as though he was not very much afraid that it would be so.

"Bah! it isn't anything but a coincidence!" the Marquis exclaimed. "If the Ratcatcher had had two grains of sense in his head the affair would not have happened."

"True, very true!"

"I did not want to quarrel with the man. I am no idiot to get into a quarrel without there is a good cause for it, but he acted like a crazy man, so I hardly think that it is fair to blame the copper box for it. The chances are that the Ratcatcher would have got into the quarrel, anyway. The liquor mounted to his head, made him ugly, and when he got in that way, it was as natural for him to use his knife as it is for a dog to bite. It was his own devilish disposition that brought him to his death, and the copper box hadn't anything to do with it."

"I agree with you, *mon brave!*" Papa Perrichon declared. "The Ratcatcher was always an ugly rascal, and he could no more keep from quarreling than he could from eating."

"But we must return to our mutton. This is a big scheme to handle, and it will be a difficult matter, I fear, for you to make anything out of it as you are not acquainted with the country."

"Yes, it is a serious disadvantage. If it was to claim an estate located in the Old World I should know how to go about it, but I know nothing about these mining matters, excepting what I have read, and I judge that the most of the miners are little better than savages."

"It is a strange field to me, also," Papa Perrichon observed, reflectively. "Still, as the prize is a great one we must do our best to win it."

"I have an idea!" exclaimed the Marquis, abruptly.

"Ah! that is good! What is it?"

"How would it do to allow some American to become interested in this matter?" the other suggested. "Some bold and skillful fellow, well acquainted with the country."

"It is a good idea!"

"You must know some man who would answer."

"I do! I can put my hands on him without any trouble!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"That is excellent!"

And the Marquis rubbed his hands together briskly in token of satisfaction.

"He is just such another man as yourself," the host remarked. "A gentleman who could pass muster in any society, yet he is a daring and desperate bloke."

"That is just the kind of man that we need," the Marquis observed. "Of course, taking him in will reduce our share, but what of that? If we succeed and gain the prize the chances are that it is big enough to be divided among a dozen, and yet each man would get enough to make him independently wealthy."

"That is my idea exactly!" Papa Perrichon asserted. "Besides as the thing looks to me the probabilities are great that we will not be able to work the scheme unless we get some man interested who is acquainted with the ground."

"Yes, I am aware that as a stranger I should be placed at a terrible disadvantage."

"This man that I have in mind is one of the leading crooks of the country, and yet so skillful is he in his operations that he is seldom arrested, and when the police do put the bracelets on him it is merely on suspicion and, after an examination, he is released because the authorities are not able to prove their charges."

"That is the man for our money!"

"And he is well-acquainted with the West too; has been all through the mining regions and knows all about the men who are to be found there, and he would have no difficulty in getting along with them."

"With such a man as that enlisted in our service success would be certain!" the Marquis declared.

"Yes, that is my idea."

"Can you find him readily?"

"Oh, yes, there is a saloon on Sixth avenue where all the first-class crooks go, and if I send word to him there he will be sure to get it."

"I would send then as soon as possible!" the Marquis declared. "In such a matter as this it is not wise to allow the grass to grow under our feet."

"You are right, my infant, I will send the message without delay."

"What shall we do with the copper box?"

"Toss it down into the sewer, and if there is any bad luck about it the rats can have the benefit," and the old Frenchman chuckled at his joke.

"Shall I take care of the paper?"

"Yes, put it away securely, for it may bring us a fortune."

The Marquis placed the paper in the inside breast pocket of his coat, Papa Perrichon tossed the copper box down the secret door, and then summoned one of his waiters to carry the message to the crook.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SCHEME.

THE messenger was instructed to bring the man if he succeeded in finding him, and during his absence Papa Perrichon and the Marquis indulged in a game of cards to pass away the time.

While thus engaged the Marquis conversed with the hotel-keeper in regard to the man who had been sent for.

"Can he be trusted?" he asked. "It would be an ugly bit of business for us to reveal the secret to this man and then have him endeavor to throw us overboard."

"I think you will find this fellow to be all right," Papa Perrichon replied. "He has always had the reputation of being a square man with his pals, and then we need not trust him with the full particulars of the secret until the last moment."

The Marquis thought that this was a good idea and said as much.

In less than an hour the messenger returned. He could not find the party but had left word for him, and on the following night, about nine o'clock, the man who had been sent for appeared; it was Dick Delmayne.

Papa Perrichon ordered a bottle of wine and greeted the confidence man in the effusive manner so natural to him.

Then he introduced the Marquis.

"This gentleman is a man of metal," he explained. "And in France, and on the continent of Europe, he bears the reputation of being as expert in his line as any bold and dextrous blade that ever laughed the power of the police to scorn."

Dick Delmayne shook hands with the Marquis and expressed in fitting terms the pleasure it gave him to make the acquaintance of so distinguished a gentleman.

Then the host pressed the new-comer to partake of the wine and explained that he had a little business matter to propose to him if he was at liberty to engage in it.

"Oh, yes, I haven't anything in particular on hand at the present time," Dick Delmayne replied.

"It is a scheme which involves a vast amount of money," Papa Perrichon declared.

"The greater the sum the better!" the visitor asserted. "I believe in big operations and take no interest in little, petty matters."

"This scheme is really a gigantic one," the host declared.

"That will suit me exactly!" the crook rejoined. "The larger the scheme the better

chance it gives a man of genius to show what he can do."

"Very true; well, if this affair goes through successfully it will give all three of us so much money that we will be able to live like princes!" Papa Perrichon averred.

"That kind of a life would suit me to a dot!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed.

"I suppose, of course, as the prize in view is such a rich one, that the risk is also great," he added.

"Oh, no, that is not the case," the Marquis remarked.

"I think we might as well explain the nature of the scheme to our dear friend, and then he will understand just what the game is," Papa Perrichon said to the Marquis.

"I presume you will not object to giving us your word to keep this affair strictly secret?" the Marquis questioned.

"Oh, no, not at all; you can depend upon my discretion, whether I go in with you or not. If I do not like the scheme I will say so frankly, but I will not breathe a word about the matter to any one. Papa Perrichon knows that I have the name of being a man who can be trusted."

"Oh, yes, I have assured my friend here that you are perfectly square," the host remarked.

"The best way to explain the matter will be to read the document to him, I suppose?" the Marquis said to the old Frenchman.

"Yes, I think so."

Then the Marquis produced the message which James Grahame had sent to his daughter and proceeded to read it.

A look of surprise appeared on the face of Dick Delmayne as he listened to the reading, but this the others thought was natural under the circumstances, for it was not possible for them to suspect that the visitor knew aught of the paper.

The Marquis read the document from beginning to end, excepting that he omitted the directions by means of which the hiding-place of the treasure could be found.

"There, my brave, what do you think of that?" the old Frenchman exclaimed when the Marquis came to the end.

"Very interesting, I must say," was Dick Delmayne's reply. "But, I say, you do not trust me fully, do you?"

"What do you mean?" the Marquis asked, while Papa Perrichon stared.

"Why, you have omitted the directions by means of which the concealed valuables can be discovered; and, by the way, what have you done with the copper box which used to hold this important document?"

The Frenchmen were amazed at the knowledge of the other.

How was it that he knew anything about the matter?

Dick Delmayne laughed as he noted the surprised look upon the countenances of the pair.

"You don't know what to make of it, eh?" he exclaimed. "Well, I do not wonder at your surprise, for it is a little startling to find that a stranger is posted in regard to a matter which you thought was known only to yourselves, but this age in which we live is the age of surprises, and a man must not be astonished if he is made to open his eyes with wonder every now and then."

"It is apparent that you know something about this matter, then?" the Marquis remarked.

"Yes, I have been in a hot chase after this copper box for some time, but the cursed thing was like a lively flea: when a man went to put his fingers on it, it was not there; it is plain, though, that you have succeeded in getting possession of the document, and I can tell you just where you got the copper box, too."

The others looked incredulous at this assertion.

"Oh, I can—no doubt about that!" the confidence man declared. "You found the copper box in the sewer: a pal of mine, close run by the police, who were after him on account of his having taken the box, finding that there wasn't any chance for him to escape, and determined to keep the box from falling into the hands of the officers if it were possible, threw the box down a sewer-hole."

"It was a good thirty hours before he could get word to me so that I was able to go after it, and then it was gone; but now that I find you are in possession of the document, which was in the copper box, I understand why I was not able to find it. You had been there before me."

"Well, I do not see as it will do any harm to admit that this paper was in a copper box, and the Marquis here did find it in the sewer," Papa Perrichon remarked.

"You see, my dear friend, the Marquis has been playing in hard luck for some time, as you Americans would say, and he bit upon the idea of trying the sewer; he had a thought, you know, that he might succeed in picking up some valuables there," the host continued.

"The copper box was certainly a valuable find," Dick Delmayne remarked. "But, by the way, I would advise you to get rid of that infernal thing, if you haven't already done so, for I have a notion that the box brings ill-luck with it."

other, but trying to conceal it, for he thought it would be very bad policy indeed for him to quarrel with a Ratcatcher even if the other was inclined to be ugly.

"We are discussing a business matter now and we want to put our heads together and plan the scheme as carefully as possible," the Marquis added.

"Just leave the matter to me and see if I do not arrange the thing in the most perfect way!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed.

The host and the Marquis looked at each other; the proposal did not suit either of them.

Papa Perrichon did not deem it wise to say so outright for he did not wish to offend the man, therefore he remarked:

"Ah! you can settle the matter without any trouble, eh?"

"Yes, I am the man who can do it!" the Ratcatcher announced, boastfully.

"That is fine!" and the old Frenchman rubbed his hands together and beamed on the Ratcatcher just as if he had full confidence in him.

"Now then tell us how you will set about it!"

"To get to this Crazy Camp you must first go to the place called Flagstaff," the Ratcatcher began laying down the points upon his fingers. "It will be an easy matter to find out where Flagstaff is, then we will proceed there, go from there to Crazy Camp, follow up the stream and secure the treasure."

"Yes, yes, that is very easy!" the host declared with a knowing nod. But how will you get to Flagstaff? It is far away, the fare is probably fifty or sixty dollars, and then you must have animals, so that you will be able to carry away the treasure after you get it."

A black look came over the Ratcatcher's face.

"Yes, that is true; I did not think of that," he admitted. "Yes, you are right, it will take quite a sum of money, but I will tell you what we will do, Papa Perrichon," he added, his face brightening up as the idea came to him. "We will let you into this scheme, the Marquis and myself, and you shall find the money for us; eh, Marquis, that will be agreeable to you?"

"Oh yes; we must have money and Papa Perrichon here is the one to find it."

"Then it is all straight sailing!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed with an air of profound wisdom.

"Ah, but there is something more to the affair than to simply get hold of the gold," the Marquis remarked.

"Eh, how is that?"

"You forget that with the gold is the secret of the lost mine."

"Ah, yes, true."

"And from what the writer says it is plain that the mine is very valuable," the host observed, "and we would be great fools to go for the gold alone."

"Very true indeed! we must get the mine!" and the Ratcatcher wagged his head in a very knowing way. "Then we will all be rich men and we can go back to France and live like princes!"

"My idea would be that it would be wise to employ this lawyer at Flagstaff that the man mentions," the Marquis said.

"Yes, I think it would be wise," Papa Perrichon remarked.

"Thunder! no!" the Ratcatcher cried. "These lawyers are all a set of thieves! How can we tell if we hired him that he will not manage to get the entire affair into his hands? We are strangers and these Americans are a lot of sharpers."

"It will be our own fault and through our own stupidity if we allow the man to cheat us," the Marquis declared.

"Well, there would be one consolation for me, I could put a knife in the rascal if he tried any tricks!" the Ratcatcher announced.

The Marquis made a gesture of impatience. He was tiring of this boasting.

"We had best wait until we are cheated before we talk of punishment," he observed.

"Yes, and there is no reason why the man should not act honestly with us," the host remarked.

"Ah, yes, but see how many you are bringing into the matter," the Ratcatcher grumbled. "First there was only the Marquis and myself, then you, Papa Perrichon, contrived to get your nose in, and now you propose to lug a lawyer in head and ears; we have a fine melon, it is true, but if we are going to allow everybody to carry off a slice, what will be left for us, I would like to know."

"Friend Ratcatcher, you are inclined to be unreasonable," Papa Perrichon remarked. "You speak about my getting my nose in, but you seem to forget that if I do not advance the money, you will not be able to accomplish anything."

"Oh, yes, I would; there are plenty more besides yourself who would be glad to put up money to get into a fine scheme like this," the other declared.

"How much will you advance?" he continued; "three or four hundred dollars perhaps, and you will be sure to want us to pay you as many thousands as you put up hundreds."

"Oh, come, friend Ratcatcher, I don't do

business in that way," the old Frenchman protested; "nor will you find anybody in my line of business either in this country or any other who will make an arrangement of that kind. You know what the usual thing is as well as I do. The man who finds the money—who makes possible the scheme, always takes an equal share with the men who do the work."

"What! give you a third?" the Ratcatcher fairly howled.

"Yes, that is but fair," the old Frenchman replied, firmly.

"I will see you to the devil first!" the Ratcatcher exclaimed, fiercely.

"You are unreasonable!" Papa Perrichon protested. "The Marquis here does not object."

"No, that is the usual arrangement," the Marquis remarked. "The Ratcatcher does not take into consideration the fact that if the scheme is not a success the backer loses all the money he puts up."

"I do not care for that! I will not give a third! You and Papa Perrichon have gone in together to rob me, but I will not have it. I will take my copper box and find some man to advance the money who will be more reasonable!"

And as he spoke the Ratcatcher jumped to his feet and advanced as though he intended to lay violent hands upon the box in which the Marquis had replaced the written paper.

Both of the others leaped to their feet.

"Your copper box!" the Marquis cried. "Surely you do not mean to claim that it belongs to you alone?"

"Did I not find it?" the Ratcatcher cried, angrily, and from the way his hand strayed to his waist it was plain he was feeling for his knife.

The Marquis was noted for his keen vision and he did not fail to notice this circumstance, so in a careless way he placed his hand upon the table, almost in contact with the hammer.

"No, you did not find it any more than I did," the Marquis replied. "We were in company and neither one could be said to have an undivided claim to the box. It is no more yours than it is mine, and no more mine than yours."

"You lie, you rascal! the box is mine, and I will have it or I will cut your heart out!" yelled the ruffian almost beside himself with rage, and as he finished the sentence he whipped out his knife and made a stroke at the Marquis while he endeavored to seize the box.

But as the other expected this movement and had made up his mind just how to meet it, the attack was an utter failure.

With his left arm the Marquis parried the knife stroke and at the same time, with wonderful quickness, he caught up the hammer and dealt the Ratcatcher a blow on the head with it that laid the ruffian out on the floor as flat as a flounder.

"Aha! a good stroke!" Papa Perrichon cried, in glee. "The rascal is justly served! Peste! I have no patience with these men who will not listen to reason."

"I fancy that when he recovers his senses he will come to the conclusion that it is a bad bit of business to attempt to frighten a man like myself with a knife," the Marquis observed as he resumed his seat.

"He fell like the ox under the blow of the butcher," Papa Perrichon observed, also resuming his seat.

"Oh, yes, in a case of this kind a man must not play with his opponent. When a fellow like the Ratcatcher resorts to the knife, he means mischief, and the quicker he is rendered harmless, the better."

"Yes, yes, the brute would not have hesitated to settle you for good and all. He always was a perfect demon when he allowed his temper to get the best of him."

"And all such fellows must be handled without gloves," the Marquis asserted. "When he comes to his senses, he will understand that I am his master, and the chances are great that we will not have any trouble with him."

"I should not be surprised. These men who act like brutes can only be subdued by a resort to force, for that is all they have any respect for; arguments are wasted on them," Papa Perrichon observed, with the air of a sage.

Then for a few moments neither of them spoke, both engaged in watching the figure of the prostrate man.

Finally Papa Perrichon began to get alarmed.

"I say, Marquis, it is strange he don't recover," he observed.

There was a grave look on the face of the other.

"I did hit him a heavy blow," the Marquis observed, reflectively.

"Yes, yes."

"Perhaps too heavy."

"But all such brutes always have skulls like an ox."

"Generally, but possibly I have overdone the thing. I meant to stun, but perhaps—" and the speaker hesitated.

"Perhaps you have given him his passport for another world," said Papa Perrichon in a low tone, completing the sentence.

"It does not seem possible, but—"

"He does not move."

"Examine him!"

The host did so.

"Well?"

"My infant, he is dead!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DECISION.

"DEAD?" the Marquis exclaimed, utterly astonished by the unexpected intelligence.

"Yes, there is no doubt about it my brave!" Papa Perrichon responded. "The rascal is stone dead."

"I am amazed," the other declared.

"It is not strange; he went down like a log beneath your blow."

"Yes, I did give him a powerful blow, for I saw that the fellow was crazy with rage, and, knowing him as I do, I understood that he meant to carve me with his knife, and I can tell you that I had no mind to be sliced."

"You acted just as I should have done under the circumstances," the host declared. "You had to hit the rascal hard enough to stun him, or else with his knife he would have made short work of you."

"I did not think that the blow would do him any serious damage though, for I fancied that he had a skull like an ox."

"Ah, well, my brave, we are all liable to make mistakes," Papa Perrichon remarked with the air of philosopher.

"It was in self-defense, of course," the Marquis observed, meditatively. "If I had not laid him out he would pretty certainly have given me a knife stroke which I would not have got over in a hurry."

"Oh, he undoubtedly would have killed you," the host asserted. "When he got in one of these mad fits he did not care what he did. But, my infant, if you will take my advice you will not let any one know aught of this matter. What is the use of troubling the police who will be sure to ask all sorts of impudent questions."

"Both you and I could swear, of course, that the blow which gave the man his death was struck purely in self-defense, but it is certain that the devils of police would doubt the tale, and they would be sure to assert that we quarreled with the man and assaulted him for the purpose of robbery."

"But his appearance would not convey the impression that he carried much wealth upon his person," the Marquis observed with a glance at the shabby clothes of the dead man.

"Very true, and if we advanced that argument, then they would be apt to set up a claim that he was a pal of ours and we killed him for revenge on account of some disputes, or something of that sort," Papa Perrichon declared.

"Yes; it is very likely that the hounds would make all the trouble that they could."

"The Ratcatcher was a stranger, and I judge from what he said that he had just arrived in the city and came straight here. The chances are great that besides ourselves there is not a soul in New York who knows anything about him. He will not be missed then. No one knows that he came here, and no one will trouble themselves about him. We can put the body in the sewer and the rats will soon make away with it," the host remarked.

The Marquis pondered over the matter for a few moments, and then he nodded his head in a decided way.

"You are right, Papa Perrichon, we would be very foolish, indeed, to say anything about the affair," he assented. "The police would be sure to make all the trouble that they could for us, and by the course that you suggest no one could possibly know anything about the matter."

"That was my thought; men like you and I, my brave, do not make anything by inviting the attention of the police."

"Certainly not!"

"We are modest men and prefer to keep in the background," Papa Perrichon observed, with a grin.

"Yes, we do not court scrutiny and investigation."

"Well, let us get this piece of carrion out of the way," the host said. "But first I will see what he has in his pockets, although I do not anticipate that I will find much."

The thought of the old Frenchman was correct.

All that the Ratcatcher had in his pockets was an old wallet which contained less than a dollar in small change, and a printed scrap, cut from some newspaper, which contained the account of the murder of an Italian, who had been stabbed to death by an unknown, supposed from his appearance to be a Frenchman.

Papa Perrichon read the account aloud.

"Aha! that was the Ratcatcher who did that job!" the Marquis exclaimed.

"Yes, it seems probable," and then turning the scrap of paper over the old man saw that the other side was a legal advertisement dated at New Orleans.

He mentioned this fact to the other.

"That fixes the place of the murder. It was at New Orleans, and that was the reason why the Ratcatcher flew from the city," the Mar-

The Frenchmen exchanged glances at this declaration, and Dick Delmayne, noticing the fact, thought that they doubted the truth of his statement.

"I know that does not seem to be at all possible that a simple copper box would be apt to bring bad luck to any one," he remarked.

"The idea seems to be ridiculous, but I believe there is something in it for all that, and I rather think you will believe so, too, when you hear the facts of the case."

"This James Grahame, the first man to get hold of the copper box, as far as I know, meets with an accident and dies shortly after the box comes in his possession."

"Then his messenger, to whom he confided the task of finding his daughter in the East here, starts on his journey with the box."

"Grahame thought that no one in this town of Crazy Camp suspected that he had discovered the Lost Mine, but some parties in the camp did have an idea that he had made a lucky strike, and as it was believed that the Lost Mine was in the neighborhood, these men got the idea into their heads that Grahame had been lucky enough to strike it, and so, when he died, and the messenger started for the East, they thought that he carried the secret of the Lost Mine with him, and so a man was dispatched to watch him."

"Upon my word! this is a regular romance!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"It is indeed!" the Marquis assented.

Both had been listening to the recital with the greatest interest.

"And it has the merit of being nothing but the actual truth," Dick Delmayne declared. "But then you know there is an old saying that truth is stranger than fiction."

"Ah, yes, it is a very ancient proverb," Papa Perrichon remarked, with a wise shake of his grizzled head.

"This man used to be a pal of mine years ago," Dick Delmayne continued, "but had been in the West so long that he did not think he was capable of handling a matter of this kind as it ought to be handled, and so he telegraphed to me to meet him at the depot, and got me to go in with him in the scheme."

"That was wise," the host observed.

"The messenger did not arrive in the city until late at night, and then he proceeded to hunt up the daughter right away," the crook continued. "But the streets of a big city like New York are sometimes very dangerous for strangers in the dark hours of the night."

The others nodded, and from the grin on their faces it was plain that they anticipated what was coming.

"The messenger was attacked by a street gang, and laid out with a fractured skull, but before the men who committed the assault could get at the copper box they were frightened off by the arrival of assistance; but you will observe that the messenger with the box was put on his back."

"Yes—yes, he was the second victim," Papa Perrichon observed.

"The wounded man was carried to the hospital, and there he lies hovering between life and death now."

"Knowing that the man was in the hospital the idea came to me to send my wife—who, by the way is a remarkably clever woman—to the institution to set up a claim for the copper casket, but as ill luck would have it, the man who came to the messenger's assistance was the celebrated detective Joe Phenix—possibly you have heard of him?"

"Oh, yes!" Papa Perrichon cried, "he is a devil! I know the man only too well." You understand, dear friend, Delmayne, how very careful I am about doing business, and yet this wretch of a detective came within an ace of catching me in spite of all my shrewdness."

"I have heard it said by good judges that this Phenix is more to be dreaded than any ten of the detectives put together," the Marquis observed.

"He is a skillful and determined man; there is no mistake about that," Dick Delmayne declared.

"Well, he was at the hospital when my wife called, and, unluckily, he knew her, while she was in the dark as to who he was, so she conversed freely with him, supposing that he was one of the doctors attached to the institution."

"As I remarked, my wife is an extremely smart woman, as shrewd and cunning as they make them, but under these circumstances she was placed at a terrible disadvantage, of course."

"Oh, yes, I can readily understand that!" the old Frenchman exclaimed. "The idea of the poor woman conversing with this bloodhound, and attempting to carry out her little game, and he, of course, laughing in his sleeve at her all the time."

"It was extremely unlucky, for her attempt to get the copper box, under pretense that it was her property, not only failed, but the effort put this infernal detective on the track of the men who were putting up the job."

"Ah, yes, what an extremely unlucky thing!" Papa Perrichon remarked in a commiserating tone. "Of course, when your lady tried to get

the copper casket the detective understood that you were the man in the background."

"Yes, the supposition was natural, of course, and the moment he got this clew he had something to work upon."

"My wife was also recognized by one of the attendants in the hospital who was a crook, and he came to me and made a bargain to get the copper box. It had been placed in charge of the hospital steward, an old Scotchman, and the crook drugged his liquor so as to get possession of the box and the old man died under the operation."

The Frenchmen looked serious and shook their heads gravely.

"He was the third victim," Papa Perrichon observed.

A superstitious man would be apt to believe that the possession of the box did bring ill luck," the Marquis remarked.

"Then the crook, with the box, hurried from the hospital," Dick Delmayne continued. "It was late at night, but that devil of a Joe Phenix, with another detective, was on the watch, having made a calculation that some attempt would be made to get at the box."

"Ah, there is no denying the fact that this Phenix is a genius, and a born man-hunter!" the old Frenchman declared.

"The crook was halted by the detective, not Phenix, but his assistant, and he had to crack him over the head with a bully to get away. Being an expert runner he managed, under cover of the night, to make his escape; he had to double on his tracks considerably so as to make sure of throwing the bloodhound off the scent, then he made his way to my house, but he hadn't been there three minutes before the door was thrown open and Joe Phenix with a squad of policemen rushed in."

"Yes, yes, I see!" the old Frenchman exclaimed. "Knowing that you were after the box he suspected when the crook gave him the slip that he would come straight to you."

"That was his calculation, of course, but the crook made a desperate rush and got away with the box. Then there was a chase in the streets; the man was finally run down, showed fight when cornered, and was laid out by a policeman's club. When he was searched, though, the copper box was not found, for he had watched his chance and flung it down a sewer hole."

"A clever trick!" the Marquis declared.

"Yes; the policeman's club fractured his skull and he died."

"Another victim of the copper casket!" the old Frenchman remarked with a solemn shake of the head.

"On his death bed he revealed to me how he had disposed of the copper box and I went the next day after it, but when I could not find the article I thought that my man must have made some mistake in regard to the place, for the idea that anybody else would be apt to get it out of the sewer never entered my head."

"It is really a remarkable narrative!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"About as strange a one as I ever heard," the Marquis commented.

"I have taken pains to explain the matter fully so that you would understand just how everything was," Dick Delmayne remarked. "And you will see from the circumstances of the case that there are more people in it than you had any idea of."

"Yes, of course, we knew nothing about these western parties," the old Frenchman remarked.

"You will have to take them into consideration; for it will not be possible to work the scheme unless they are admitted to a share," the confidence man said.

"How many are there of them?" the Marquis asked.

"Three."

"And there are three of us," Papa Perrichon said.

"Yes, and that makes six all told," Dick Delmayne observed: "six to share whatever swag may be gained; but, gentlemen, if there isn't some tall lying about this matter there is wealth enough in this thing to give twenty or thirty men a big stake apiece."

"Yes, it certainly seems so," the old Frenchman replied. "And then it must be taken into consideration too that it is a scheme which cannot be worked by a couple of men, that is if the design is to get hold of this Lost Mine."

"Well, it seems to me that we would be very foolish if we did not go for the mine," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"Oh, we will make a big mistake in my opinion if we do not secure the property," the Marquis declared. "If it is only worth one-tenth of what is reported to be its value it will make us all independently wealthy."

"It is understood then that we six will go into the scheme," Dick Delmayne said. "By rights I suppose I ought to say seven," he added, "for my wife is as much interested in the case as any one and has done as much to help the matter on."

"Well, as far as I am concerned I have no objection to the lady coming in," the old Frenchman remarked, gallantly. "One more or less does not matter."

"I am agreeable," the Marquis said.

"There is luck in odd numbers too, particularly in seven which is a mystic figure," the crook declared. "And speaking in that vein reminds me of the copper box. I hope you have got rid of it, for although I am not particularly inclined to be superstitious yet the chain of fatalities which seem to be associated with the article makes me afraid that there is some truth in the notion that the copper casket carries bad luck with it, and so I would rather not have it in my possession."

"Neither am I superstitious," Papa Perrichon observed, "but I do believe there is such a thing as good and bad luck, and when I found out that the copper casket was supposed to be unlucky the Marquis and I agreed that it had better be thrown away."

The old Frenchman was careful though in this explanation not to drop a hint of the last tragedy due to the baleful influence of the copper box.

"I think you acted wisely," the confidence man remarked.

"Now it is understood that we seven are to go into this thing, share and share alike," the crook continued.

The others nodded assent.

"Well, now that we have got a clew to the locality where the treasure is concealed, the quicker we get out West and commence our search for it the better. The Marquis, myself and the Westerners to do the work, and you will find the funds, I suppose," the confidence man said with a questioning glance at the old Frenchman.

"Yes, yes, I find the money; how much do you suppose will be required?" Papa Perrichon asked.

"It will take a good big sum, for this is no small scheme, you know," Dick Delmayne replied.

"Two or three hundred dollars?" the old Frenchman suggested.

"Oh, no, that will not be enough. It will take a thousand, at the least."

Papa Perrichon shook his head.

"A thousand dollars! my goodness! that is a large amount of money to risk on a single speculation," the old man declared. "And if we did not succeed I would lose the cash."

"Nothing venture, nothing win," you know," the crook replied.

And then sounded the shrill notes of a bell.

Papa Perrichon jumped to his feet in alarm.

"It is the police!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KEEN ON THE SCENT.

"THE police!" the others exclaimed, also leaping to their feet.

"Yes, they have entered the saloon, and my bartender there has warned me that there is danger of a raid," the old Frenchman explained. "The wire of this bell comes from a button on the floor, under the bar, and all the man has to do is to press his foot upon it, so that it is almost impossible for the police to surprise him in such a way that he cannot give the warning."

"I am afraid that I have been shadowed," Dick Delmayne declared. "I had an idea that a spy was on my track when I left Sixth avenue, but I doubled and twisted around in such a way that I did not believe the keenest tracker would be able to keep me in sight. I have no doubt that that infernal Joe Phenix is at the bottom of it."

"That document!" exclaimed Papa Perrichon, "quick! give it to me that I may conceal it. If it is Joe Phenix that has invaded the house, he is quite capable of searching all of us, and if he should do so the paper would be discovered!"

The Marquis gave the document to Papa Perrichon and he opened a little secret drawer, cunningly contrived in the wainscot of the room and placed the paper therein.

"There! I think that is safe!" the old Frenchman exclaimed in accents full of satisfaction as he closed the secret drawer. "Cunning as this detective is I think it will bother him to find that secret hole!"

Then the old man produced a pack of cards, the three seated themselves and began to play. Soon the knob of the door was tried, and when it was found that the portal was locked there came a vigorous knock.

The old Frenchman jumped to his feet, hurried to the door and opened it, just as if he had not any suspicion in regard to who the visitors were.

Into the room came Joe Phenix, followed by a couple of officers, who carried their clubs in their hands, just as if they expected that there would be trouble, and they wanted to be prepared for it.

"Ah, Monsieur Phenix!" exclaimed Papa Perrichon, in accents of glad surprise, "how do you do? I am very much amazed to see you! It is a long time since you honored me with a visit. Walk in, please, and I am very glad, too, to see these gentlemen; will you have a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you, Papa," replied the detective as he advanced into the room and favored the inmates with a keen glance from his piercing gray eyes. "Enjoying a game of cards?"

"Yes, trying to pass the time away as pleas-

antly as possible," Dick Delmayne answered. "What is up now, Mr. Phenix, you have not come on business, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, I have no time for pleasure calls," the detective replied.

"Not after me this time I trust?" the confidence man observed, betraying no alarm as he put the question.

"Yes, I shall have to follow you up, you know, until I get hold of that copper box," Joe Phenix replied.

"Until you get hold of the copper box, eh?" and Dick Delmayne laughed as though he considered the matter to be a good joke.

"Yes, I am hot after it."

"That may be, but I can assure you that you will not get it by chasing me around!" the crook declared in the most confident manner.

"Don't you be too sure of that!" the detective warned.

"Well, I had an idea that a shadow was on my track when I came down Sixth avenue to-night."

"And that is the reason why you doubled and turned on your track like a hunted foe?" the detective queried.

"Oh, well, I wanted to make the man earn his money, you know," the crook replied with a laugh.

"I think you did carry out that idea pretty thoroughly, judging from the man's report."

"But, I say, what is the use of your troubling yourself about me in this way, to talk the matter over seriously. You have tried to corner me, but you did not succeed in doing anything, and I can just tell you that you are wasting your time now."

"No, I do not think so, and it is an easy matter for you to put a stop to it, you know," the detective declared. "All you have got to do is to produce the copper box."

"I can't produce what I have not got!" the crook replied in a defiant way.

"Then you must not be amazed if I keep after you. You ought to know me well enough by this time, Delmayne. I am not a man who gives up while there is a chance for success."

"Well, you will not make it this time I can tell you!"

"You may change your mind before the affair is ended," the detective remarked.

"What is your charge now?" Dick Delmayne exclaimed in a defiant way. "I suppose you have cooked up some sort of an accusation against me."

"I have a warrant for your arrest and it is no light matter I can tell you if you don't get out of it."

"Well, what is it?"

"Murder!"

Dick Delmayne laughed contemptuously.

"Murder, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will have to admit that I am rather astonished at the charge," the crook declared. "Who am I accused of murdering?"

"Andrew Martin, the steward of the hospital," Joe Phenix answered.

"Oh, come now! that is all nonsense!" Dick Delmayne declared, amazed at the revelation, for it was entirely unexpected to him. "Why, I never was inside of that institution in my life!"

"That may be, but you furnished your pal, Sharp, with the drug which he administered to the old Scotchman in order to rob him of the copper casket, so if you were not the principal, you were an accomplice, and the law will search for you just the same!"

"An examination has been made of the body of the old man, and ample proof found to show that he was drugged, and that the drug produced death."

"This is all a trumped-up charge, and it will not hold water!" Dick Delmayne declared, angrily. "And you know it, too! You know very well that it will not be possible for you to prove that I had anything to do with the affair, even if I did furnish the drug. A thing of that sort is not easily proven, and you know it too as well as I do!"

"But I understand what your game is just as well as though I had planned the whole thing myself!" the crook continued. "You think you have caught me at a disadvantage, and you want a chance to search me; you think you can get at the copper box, but if you find any copper box on me I will agree to eat it, and I am not fond of food of that kind, either!"

"Yes, I shall take the liberty of going through you," Phenix remarked, approaching the crook.

"You are quite welcome to do so, but you will not make anything by it!" Dick Delmayne asserted. "I don't know anything about this copper box that you are so crazy after."

The search was made, and naught was found, much to the detective's disappointment.

The host thought that it was about time that he said something.

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Phenix, I feel sure that you have made some mistake!" Papa Perrichon exclaimed with a smirking grin. "Our friend here may make a little mistake sometimes in regard to bank checks and such matters, but he is not the man to be mixed up in a murder case."

"Well, I know that an affair of the kind is a little out of your line, Delmayne, still as suspicion is strongly directed toward you I shall have to put the bracelets on," the detective said.

"There isn't any need of doing that, Phenix. I am not going to run away!" the crook declared. "I give you my word that there isn't the slightest danger of my making a bolt. I will go with you as quietly as a lamb. I know that you cannot make anything out of this charge and I am not at all afraid to meet it."

"Your first move will be of course to search me," and the lip of the confidence man curled with a sneer. "But I can tell you before you begin that you will not find any copper box upon me nor any indication that I know anything about it. In fact, Detective Phenix, I am giving it to you as straight as a string when I declare that so far from having the copper box in my possession I never even saw the article."

This statement did not produce the slightest impression upon the detective.

He knew the crook well enough to understand that no reliance whatever could be placed upon his word, and that he would swear just as freely to a falsehood as to the truth.

"If you have no objection I will see what you have on your person," Joe Phenix said.

"No objection in the world, go ahead!" the other replied in the most cheerful manner.

A thorough search Joe Phenix made of the crook, but the scouting was not productive of any results.

"You see I told you the truth!" Dick Delmayne declared, with an appearance of great frankness.

"You are playing your game very well, Delmayne," the detective remarked. "But I hope to be able to trap you in the long run."

"Well, you will not, Phenix, for you are barking up the wrong tree!" the crook declared.

"And now I ask you what is the use of your pushing this murder charge? I know well that you have not got any proof I had anything to do with the affair, and what is more, you can't get any! You can put me to a little trouble—I shall have to get a lawyer, but I will get out of it easily enough, for you know that you cannot produce evidence enough to warrant any magistrate in holding me for trial."

"Oh, you don't know what evidence I have secured!" the detective retorted.

"I know that you can't have any that amounts to anything!" Dick Delmayne declared. "You know that Sharp came to my house after he left the hospital—after the death of the old Scotchman, I presume—but that is no proof that I had any hand in assisting Sharp to murder the old man; that is if he did murder him."

"Well, I will have to take you to Headquarters, and you can talk to the superintendent there. If he chooses to let you go I shall not object, for I have done my duty."

"Ah, my dear friend Delmayne will have no difficulty, I am sure, in convincing the superintendent that he did not have anything to do with the matter," Papa Perrichon declared.

"Well, I hope so; although I am a man-hunter it is always more pleasant to me to have a man prove that he is innocent than otherwise," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Well, detective, I will do you the justice to say that though I don't know a man on the force who hunts a crook down more relentlessly than you do, yet after you get your man, I never knew you to be hard or vindictive with him," Dick Delmayne declared.

"It is as an officer of the law that I pursue the man who transgresses," Joe Phenix explained. "I am not a private avenger, and when I hunt my game down and the delivery of justice is made, my work is done. I am as inflexible as the law I represent, but do not stoop to prosecution."

"Ah, Monsieur Phenix, I have always declared that you were a fine man!" Papa Perrichon exclaimed.

"Well, I am really afraid that I am going to give you cause to change your opinion," the detective remarked, and there was a faint smile on his lips as he spoke.

The old Frenchman took alarm at once.

"Why, my goodness, Monsieur Phenix, you do not mean to say that you have come with the idea of making trouble for me?" he cried.

"I regret to say that I am here to investigate a very serious charge which has been made against you," Joe Phenix replied.

"I am not afraid of an examination!" Papa Perrichon protested. "I am an honest man, and have no cause to fear."

"What has become of the Frenchman, Durell, usually called the Ratcatcher?" Joe Phenix demanded.

Never in this world was a man more taken by surprise than the Frenchman by this entirely unexpected question, for he had no more suspicion that the detective was about to ask in regard to the vagabond Frenchman than he had that the roof would suddenly fall and crush him.

But, though thus completely surprised, Papa Perrichon was too old and experienced a rascal to betray his true feelings.

He appeared to be amazed, and he looked at the detective with startled eyes, but it was the

amazement of a man who does not know what to make of a question.

"A Frenchman, Durell, usually called the Ratcatcher?" he exclaimed, and the sentence was uttered for the express purpose of gaining time, so as to enable him to collect his thoughts that he might devise a way to meet this sudden blow.

"That is what I said," the detective repeated, sternly.

"I am surprised—very much surprised!" the old man protested. "I do not know anything about such a man."

"Now my advice to you is not to make matters worse by attempting to deny the truth," Joe Phenix remarked. "Your denial is useless, for I am aware that you do know this Frenchman. He came into your place last night. He was seen to go in but no one ever saw him come out."

Papa Perrichon was dumfounded at this statement, for he had no idea that a watch had been set upon his house, but he rallied bravely and exclaimed:

"Oh, my dear Monsieur Phenix, there must be some mistake! I do not know the man of whom you speak—that is, by that name, although I may by another. But you understand how that is. I keep a hotel—a wine shop, and in the course of a day have many customers. Some I know by name, and am well acquainted with them, others I do not know at all; that is I may know them when I see them, if they come in my place once in a while, but, of course, they all know me, and I suppose a great many of them think I know all about them when, in reality, I do not. It may be that it is this way in the case of this Ratcatcher."

"Oh, no, it is not; your memory is at fault," Joe Phenix replied in his stern and inflexible way. "Take time to think over the matter, and perhaps you will be able to remember."

"Durell, the Ratcatcher, was no common acquaintance—no casual customer, but an old pal of yours whom you knew in France long before you had any idea of coming to this country. He was a man of the Commune like yourself, and one who, when the Commune was crushed, was obliged to fly from France, just as you did."

This speech showed Papa Perrichon that the detective was fully informed in regard to the missing Frenchman, and in his heart he was much troubled, although he was experienced actor enough not to allow the fact to be seen, only his face expressing a mild kind of surprise.

He was sorely afraid though that some trap had been set for him; still he was at a loss to understand how the Ratcatcher could be mixed up in such a thing, for he could not bring himself to believe that Durell had come to his house as a police spy.

The only explanation of the mystery which seemed reasonable to him, was that the Ratcatcher had a pal with him—it is common for men of the Ratcatcher stamp to travel in pairs—and to this pal Durell had told the story of his acquaintance with him, Perrichon; the other had waited outside while the Ratcatcher came into the saloon, and when he found that the Ratcatcher did not come out, had gone to the trouble of calling the attention of the police to the case.

This was a reasonable solution of the mystery, and would explain how Joe Phenix came by his knowledge.

And it may be remarked in passing that Papa Perrichon had hit upon the truth. The Ratcatcher had been accompanied by a pal, a disreputable-looking tramp, a drunken German, whom he had met on the "road," and to this man the Frenchman had expressed the belief that he could make a "stake" out of his old acquaintance, and requested him to wait without the saloon while he went in to "strike" the proprietor.

The German waited with all the patience of his stolid race—waited until the saloon closed at midnight, and then he went to sleep in a neighboring doorway, but when morning came, and no Ratcatcher appeared, he made bold to slouch into the saloon and inquire concerning his pal.

The barkeeper, of course, knew nothing about the matter. He had not taken any particular notice of the Ratcatcher, and being unfavorably impressed with the looks of the questioner, got rid of him with scant ceremony.

The fellow then watched outside the place until late in the afternoon, and by that time, having got pretty drunk on stale beer, which he got from the empty kegs of the big saloon on the next corner, had marched into the wine-shop with the intention of kicking up a row if information of his friend was not forthcoming.

The barkeeper, a stalwart Frenchman, who hated all Germans with the patriotic fervor of a true son of Gaul—wasted no words upon the drunken bummer, but when the fellow swaggered up to the counter and made the announcement that he came to make "some troubles" if he was not gratified by information in regard to his pal, promptly grabbed him by the throat, turned him around and kicked him into the street in a vigorous manner which brought forth howls of disapproval from the intoxicated tramp.

After this reception the German did not dare

to invade the saloon again, but crawled off to an obscure corner, where he slept away the effect of the stale beer.

But when he awoke at nightfall the remembrance of his wrong rankled in his breast, and as he was anxious to be avenged, he confided to a policeman who happened to come along, his suspicions that his pard had met with foul play in the French saloon.

The policeman chanced to be a man who loved a joke, and as he attached no importance whatever to the tramp's story he thought it would be the richest kind of a jest to send the fellow to Police Headquarters to interview the superintendent, and he did so.

"From smallest trifles spring deepest consequences."

A truer line was never written.

The policeman's joke introduced the drunken German into the presence of the superintendent of police just as he was holding a conference with Joe Phenix in regard to a report made by one of the professional shadows that he had tracked Dick Delmayne from his usual resort, the Sixth avenue saloon, to the Hotel de France, and the shadow had expressed the opinion that from the unusual care that the crook had taken to prevent his footsteps from being tracked, Delmayne was bound on some important business.

The pair were just trying to think of some scheme which would justify a forcible invasion of Papa Perrichon's premises when the drunken German came in with his story of the mysterious disappearance of his pal, Durell, the Ratcatcher.

The two eagerly caught at the chance; it was the very opportunity they desired. Here was an excuse to arrest the Frenchman and search the premises.

"Joe Phenix had got the copper box 'on the brain' as the chief laughingly asserted, and every move that Dick Delmayne made he fancied might have some connection with that mysterious article, and that was why he was anxious to get some plausible excuse to search the Frenchman's house the moment he discovered that Dick Delmayne had proceeded hither.

The fortunate star of the detective was surely in the ascension on this particular night, for no sooner had he arranged a plan of action with the superintendent, covering a descent of the police on the Hotel de France, the arrest of the old Frenchman on the charge of murdering the Ratcatcher, and Dick Delmayne as being an accessory of Sharp in the death of the hospital steward, than the warden of Sing Sing prison, New York State's famous jail, was introduced.

A convict had just died in the prison and on his death-bed he had told the warden a strange tale concerning the old house occupied by Papa Perrichon.

The convict was an old man, and had formerly been in the employ of the landlord of the Hotel de France; a Jack of all trades, a very genius with tools, he could turn his hand to almost anything.

After the warden told his story and departed, the superintendent rejoined Joe Phenix with the information that he had received news that would be likely to be of use to him.

The importance of this information the reader will see anon; suffice it to say at present, that after he became possessed of it the detective felt certain that he was on the road to an important discovery.

The further events of this momentous invasion we will leave for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXV. THE DISCOVERY.

PAPA PERRICHON was an expert in sword-fencing and although the detective had so far got decidedly the best of the contest yet the old Frenchman came up smiling, as an English sporting writer would remark, and, to carry out the simile, although a little disfigured he was still in the ring.

"Ah, yee, what you say may be true," the old Frenchman remarked, with one of the expressive shrugs of the shoulders so natural to men of his nation. "It is a long time ago to the days of the Commune. I was one of the leaders of the movement, and came in contact with a great many men; but, my dear Monsieur Phenix, don't you think that it is expecting too much of a man to go upon the assumption that he would be able to recall the names of all the parties whom he might have encountered during such stormy times?"

This was very well put, and the detective comprehended that in the old Frenchman he had an opponent worthy of his steel.

"You do not remember any such man as Durell, otherwise known as the Ratcatcher?"

"I do not!" Papa Perrichon responded firmly.

He had made up his mind that it was wise for him to deny all knowledge of his old-time associate.

The detective undoubtedly had information which satisfied him that the Ratcatcher had entered the saloon, but he did not believe it was possible that Phenix could prove that he, personally, knew anything about the matter.

If the Ratcatcher was a police spy and had come into the house for the purpose of getting him into a scrape, then his denial would only

make matters worse, and he would be in a very bad way indeed; but the wily old Frenchman could not bring himself to believe that this could be the case.

The Ratcatcher was an unmitigated rascal he knew, a scoundrel of the first water, yet for all that a most unlikely man to become an agent of police, for he hated these ministers of justice in the most deadly manner, and it was about as likely that oil and water would perfectly commingle as to expect a son of the streets, who had fought the police ever since the time when he had been old enough to comprehend what a policeman was, to suddenly join hands with his ancient foes.

"As I said, my dear Monsieur Phenix," the old Frenchman continued, "it is very possible indeed that the man has been in here. If you say so, I do not doubt it, for I know that you are a man who always knows what he is talking about, but I assure you that I have no knowledge of the fact."

"Perrichon, when a man gets into a bad place it is my idea that he ought to try and get out of it as soon, and as easily, as possible," the detective said, slowly.

"Certainly! there is no doubt about that!" the old Frenchman declared. "It is words of wisdom that you are speaking, Monsieur Phenix."

"Well, it is my idea that you are in a bad place, and I think I am giving you good counsel when I advise you to make a clean breast of it, for I give you my word that I possess a deal more knowledge about you and your affairs than you think for," Joe Phenix remarked, in his serious way, which usually had great weight with those to whom he spoke.

But shrewd as was the old Frenchman he made the mistake of thinking that the detective was trying a bit of "bluff" upon him, so he grinned in a sardonic way, showing his teeth, and said:

"Ah, Monsieur Phenix, a man who hasn't anything to say cannot very well make a confession. You do not want me to lie about the matter? You do not expect me to say, 'Oh, yes, I killed the Ratcatcher!' who, judging, from his name, would turn out to be very unprofitable game indeed?"

"I do not profess to know much about the business as a detective, still I believe one of their favorite schemes is to say to a man, 'I have you dead to rights, my friend, you cannot get out of the hole, but if you will make a clean breast of the affair to me I will see what I can do for you,' and then the poor fool, thinking that the detective really does know, is donkey enough to give the snap away."

"I suppose you believe I am trying to work a game of that kind on you?" Joe Phenix asked, with a quiet smile.

"Oh, well, I don't know," the old man answered, with one of his prodigious shrugs of the shoulder. "I should not think that such a master of his business as yourself would try it; still, it is a game that all the detectives that I know are very fond of."

"Will you open the secret trap-door in the closet yonder, or shall I try my hand at it?" the detective asked, in the most matter-of-fact way.

Despite all his self-possession the old man was so surprised by the speech that he could not help showing it.

His under-jaw dropped, and his eyes assumed a glassy expression as he stared at the detective in a helpless sort of way.

The brow of the Marquis, too, grew dark, and he gave a quick glance around, as though he was seeking for an opportunity to escape.

But if that was his idea, it was not possible to carry it out, for the stalwart blue-coats guarded the door, the only means of egress from the room.

Dick Delmayne surveyed the scene with such unconcern—the expression upon his face so different from that upon the features of the others—that Joe Phenix, who was watching with the eyes of a hawk, came to the mental conclusion that he was not at all disturbed by the speech which had so startled the others.

He was either the most wonderful actor that ever existed, or else he knew nothing about the secret of the closet, and so it was a matter of no moment to him whether the detective knew all about it or not.

The story of the secret trap-door was the intelligence that the warden of Sing Sing Prison brought to the superintendent of police.

"So help me Heaven! I don't know anything about any secret trap-door!" Papa Perrichon blurted out, nervously.

"I will have to examine for myself, then," Joe Phenix said.

Then from his pocket he took a small-sized folding "jemmy," as the toy-like crowbar of the burglar is called, went to the closet, opened the door, knelt down and began to examine the floor, the pair of rascals watching him with distended eyes.

They comprehended that in some mysterious way the detective had become possessed of the secret of the closet.

But in spite of that, both of them felt that it would be best for them to persist in declaring

that they did not know anything about the affair, no matter what discoveries might be made.

Joe Phenix endeavored to find the spring which operated the trap, but it was so carefully concealed that he was not able to accomplish the feat.

"I will have to try the jimmy and smash things," the detective remarked, preparing to insert the tool in a crack which he had discovered, and which he believed to be on the edge of the door.

"I don't know anything about it, Monsieur Phenix, I assure you!" the old Frenchman declared forcing a smile, for by this time he had recovered from the shock of the surprise.

Dick Delmayne looked on, evidently interested by the proceeding, but the detective felt quite satisfied from his manner that he did not know anything about the closet.

Crack!

The trap-door yielded to the stern force of the powerful tool and up it came, revealing the dark pit beneath into which a ladder led.

"Quite an interesting discovery, Papa Perrichon," Joe Phenix remarked as he peered down into the inky darkness.

"My dear Monsieur Phenix, I assure you I am amazed!" the old Frenchman declared, blandly.

By this time Papa Perrichon was himself again; he had rapidly calculated the chances, and came to the conclusion that the danger which had at first appeared to be so great really did not amount to much, and so he felt decidedly easier in his mind.

"Will I find the Ratcatcher down here?" the detective demanded, abruptly.

"The chances are, my dear Monsieur Phenix, that you will not even if he had been made away with and placed in the pit for concealment," the old Frenchman answered with perfect composure.

"If he was put down here, why will I not be able to find him?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Phenix, you have forgotten the rats!" the old Frenchman exclaimed, with a sardonic grin.

"The rats?"

"Yes; in such a place there is sure to be a swarm of rats," the Frenchman remarked. "I know how it is in my wine cellar. There is a host of them down there, fine fat fellows, and they soon make mince-meat out of anything eatable that comes within their reach."

The detective reflected for a moment. The point that the old Frenchman made was a strong one, and Joe Phenix was intelligent enough to see it.

In the beginning he had not attached any importance to the tramp's story about the missing Frenchman; all that it amounted to was, that it offered him an excuse to search the house.

The copper casket was what he was after.

But the consternation that had seized upon Papa Perrichon and his companion when they discovered that the secret of the trap-door in the closet was known to the detective—a consternation plainly apparent to the experienced eyes of Joe Phenix, made him think there might be some truth in the tramp's suspicions that his companion had been foully dealt with.

True—he could not conceive why the old Frenchman and his gang should want to murder such a man as the Ratcatcher; not for the purpose of gain, evidently, for, according to the German's story, the money of his companion was about gone.

Then to the mind of the detective came the remembrance that the Ratcatcher had told his companions that he was going in to strike Papa Perrichon for a stake. That sounded a little like a threat.

It might be possible that the Ratcatcher was in possession of some secret concerning the old Frenchman, and that he had threatened exposure if he was not paid. Under those circumstances it was not improbable that the Ratcatcher had been murdered by the Frenchman, or at his instigation.

But even if this was so, and the body had been concealed by throwing it down the pit, if the Frenchman's story about the rats was true—and Joe Phenix had little doubt that it was—it would be an extremely difficult matter to bring the crime home to the authors of it.

These thoughts passed rapidly through the mind of the detective, but he did not take much time to speculate upon the subject.

From his pocket he drew a dark lantern, lit it, and then proceeded to descend the ladder without replying to the words of Papa Perrichon.

The first thing that encountered his eyes when he arrived at the bottom of the pit was the copper casket.

"Aha! at last I have secured it!" he exclaimed, hastening to possess himself of the article.

The copper box was closed, so Joe Phenix was not aware that it had been rifled of its contents, and therefore his victory was a barren one.

The detective was not content with this discovery, but proceeded to see what else he could find.

A little further on he came upon some bones which looked to him as though they had once belonged to a human.

Not a vestige of flesh was on them, and the

detective concluded that the rats had been at work, exactly as the old Frenchman had predicted.

There were some rags in the corner of the pit, and Joe Phenix examined them carefully, but they were in such small pieces, so torn and shredded, that it was not possible for any one to make anything out of them.

"There is not much doubt that these are the bones of this Frenchman who was called the Ratcatcher," the detective observed, after making these discoveries.

"I did not think there was anything in the tramp's yarn, but I begin to think now that he was right in his surmise that the Ratcatcher had been murdered in this den. He worried the rats while he lived, but Fate decreed that they should have their revenge upon his remains.

The detective made a careful examination of the pit and discovered that it connected with the sewer, and after he ascertained this fact then the explanation of how Dick Delmayne and Papa Perrichon came to be connected suddenly flashed upon him.

"They murdered the Ratcatcher—the Frenchman and his gang, and then the body was placed in this hole so that the rats would speedily remove all traces of the crime, then some of the men went into the sewer and found the copper box there, but how in the mischief did Papa Perrichon, or any of his men know that Dick Delmayne was after the copper casket?"

The detective puzzled his brain with this riddle for a few moments and then shook his head as a token that he gave it up.

Then another thought came to him, and he surveyed the copper box in an extremely doubtful way.

"I've got the box at last," he murmured, "but the chances are big that the box itself is all that I have got. The rascals have helped themselves to the contents and thrown the box down the pit, thinking by such a course to prevent it from ever being discovered.

"I have worked pretty hard in this matter and I flattered myself that I had managed it extremely well, but I be hanged if I don't believe the scoundrels have got the best of the fight; still I don't despair, for that does not prove that they will win in the long run.

"They have played the game in the most careful manner so far, but they will be sure to make a mistake some time, and then, if I am on the watch, I will be apt to trap them."

The man-hunter searched the pit and the sewer in the immediate neighborhood again, hoping to find some article which might aid in proving to whom the polished bones belonged, but was not successful in this undertaking.

"These fellows are too old hands at the business not to look out for such an important point," the detective remarked as he climbed the ladder.

When he entered the room he found the three men seated by the table, while the policemen guarded the door, and though they looked at him with inquiring eyes as he entered yet they did not seem to be at all alarmed.

Joe Phenix guessed why it was that they took matters so coolly.

When he had sprung his knowledge of the secret trap-door upon them abruptly they, taken by surprise, were alarmed, but now having had time to reflect upon the matter they had come to the conclusion that they were not threatened by any great danger.

"Now, my men, I shall have to put the bracelets on you," Joe Phenix remarked as he advanced into the room with the copper box under his arm.

"I have succeeded in finding the casket as you see, Delmayne," he continued. "But it is my impression that I will not make much by my discovery for I suppose you have removed the contents."

"I give you my word, Phenix, that this is the first time that I ever saw the box in my life!" Dick Delmayne declared. "I do not suppose that you will credit the tale, of course, but it is the truth, and if the contents of the casket are missing I have not got the articles."

"Well, if that is so then I am wrong in my surmise," the detective remarked.

"I am sorry to say, my men, that it is my opinion from the discoveries I have made in the pit below that all three of you are in a pretty tight place."

"Oh, no, you are mistaken!" Papa Perrichon declared. "Of course, I do not know what you have found in this mysterious underground place, the existence of which I did not suspect, as long as I have lived in the house, but I am quite certain that it was not possible for you to find any evidence there implicating me in any crime."

"And I am not an inmate of the house!" the Marquis remarked. "I merely stopped in to enjoy a glass of wine with Papa Perrichon and pass an hour or so away at cards, therefore whatever you may have discovered cannot be evidence against me."

"And it is just sheer nonsense for you to look at me as if you thought I could be troubled by this matter!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "I have not been in this place for a month and just happened to drop in to-night by accident."

"I have found the bones of the missing man—this Frenchman, the Ratcatcher, and I arrest all three of you on the charge of having murdered him!" Joe Phenix declared.

Papa Perrichon laughed and wagged his grizzled head as though he was amused by the accusation instead of alarmed.

"Oh, come, Monsieur Phenix, you are trying your bluff game again, you know!" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps you will find out before you get through with this matter that there is not so much bluff about it as you imagine," the detective retorted.

"Ah, well, I am not a child!" the old Frenchman declared with a cynical laugh. "It is not an easy matter to frighten me with words.

"This case can be settled in a speedy manner; either you have evidence or you have not. You say that you have discovered the bones of the Ratcatcher.

"I know that you are an able man, Monsieur Phenix; it is my impression that there isn't a better man in the detective business than yourself, but are you so expert as to be able to distinguish the bones of one man from another?"

"You declare positively that you have found the bones of a certain man, but that man is a stranger to you; you never saw him, and even if you were well acquainted with him, are his bones so different from other men that you would be able to identify them without any trouble?"

"Ah, Monsieur Phenix, you are a great man, no doubt!" and the old fellow shook his head in a solemn way, "but you cannot persuade me that you would be able to accomplish a feat like this. It is beyond the power of mortal man, and even you, great and skillful as you are, cannot do it."

Joe Phenix comprehended at once that the point was a strong one, and he understood too that he was dealing with old and experienced men who could not be easily frightened.

"Oh, I know that it may be a difficult job to prove that these particular bones are the bones of the missing Frenchman," he admitted. "Still it is one of those cases where it is not possible for the most skillful of men to anticipate how the matter will turn out.

"You must remember that I have not made a careful examination, and when the pit, and the adjoining sewer, come to be searched in a thorough manner it is very probable that something will be secured which will prove beyond a doubt that the bones I found are the bones of the missing Frenchman."

"Ah, Monsieur Phenix, this is a case where the wish is father to the thought," Papa Perrichon declared, with a sardonic grin.

"But now here is another point—another nut for you to crack, oh, most worthy detective! Suppose you do find something by means of which you will succeed in proving that the bones are the bones of the Ratcatcher, will that prove that he was murdered, or if he was murdered that I, or either of these gentlemen, had anything to do with the crime?"

"You are quite a lawyer, Papa Perrichon!" Joe Phenix exclaimed with a grim smile.

"Oh, no, I am no lawyer, but I possess sound common sense and that tells me that it takes evidence to convict a man of a crime when it comes to a court of justice."

"Well, I am not going to argue the point with you for it would be an unprofitable waste of time," the detective rejoined. "And if we talked the matter over from now until Doomsday we would not be able to settle the case."

"My duty in the premises is clear. I arrest all three of you on the charge of murdering the Ratcatcher. Then, after you are out of the way, a careful search of the house will be made and if the man was killed in the house the chances are great that some evidence going to show who were his murderers will be apt to be found."

"I see that you are determined to go ahead, reason or no reason!" the old Frenchman declared.

"Yes, it appears to me that it is my duty to do so," the detective replied.

"But I say, Phenix, it is all dead wrong, you know, to mix me up in this affair!" Dick Delmayne protested. "I don't know anything about this Ratcatcher—never heard of the man in all my life and there isn't the slightest reason why you should run me in. When was the man missed any way?" he added, abruptly.

"Last night," the detective replied. "He came into this place in the evening and was never seen to leave it."

"Oh, I can easily prove an alibi then!" the crook exclaimed. "I sat down to play poker with a party at eight o'clock last night and the game did not break up until six this morning. Then I laid down on a lounge in the back room and slept until noon, so that lets me out."

"You forget that I have a warrant for you on the charge of being concerned in the murder of the old hospital steward," the detective replied.

"Oh, that is all rot!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed, in a tone of deep disgust. "You know very well that you cannot make anything out of that accusation!"

"The fact of the matter is that you are on a general fishing excursion, and you think by hauling me up on these ridiculous charges that you may be able to strike something, but if you do you are a cursed sight smarter than I think you are!"

"I will nail you in the long run," Joe Phenix remarked, in a tone so full of firm conviction that it made the crook scowl with anger.

Then the handcuffs were placed upon the three, and one of the policemen escorted them to the front door where three more officers kept watch.

Two of them took charge of the prisoners, and the march to the Police Headquarters commenced.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RESULT.

DETECTIVE FITZGERALD and Tony Western, Joe Phenix's assistant were in the lower part of the house, and after the prisoners departed the three man-hunters made an exhaustive search of the premises.

Before commencing this proceeding though the trio examined the copper casket, discovered the spring and got it open.

It was empty, as Joe Phenix had expected it would be.

"The rascals have got away with the contents!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "I am not surprised, for I thought as much."

"Whatever was in the copper box is probably concealed somewhere in the house," Ned Fitzgerald suggested.

And so one of the main objects of the search was to discover where the contents of the copper casket had been put.

Thanks to the remarkably contrived hiding-place where the old Frenchman had bestowed the document it escaped the scrutiny of the searchers.

Again the detective was baffled.

Not only was he unable to discover where the contents of the copper box had been placed, but the search did not bring to light any evidence likely to assist the law in connecting the arrested men of a crime.

"Papa Perrichon is too shrewd a rascal," Joe Phenix observed, "not to make everything safe."

"Yes, but it really seemed as if we had a chance to catch him, we raided the house so soon after the murder," Fitzgerald remarked. "And it isn't possible that he could have any suspicion that trackers would be after him so soon."

"It is as I said," Joe Phenix replied. "The old Frenchman is an extra shrewd scoundrel and as he went on the idea that the bloodhounds might strike his track at any time he made everything safe."

After the search was completed in the house the party descended into the pit, gathered the bones in a box, together with some of the shreds of cloth, and after a careful examination, which was not productive of any results, followed the prisoners to Police Headquarters.

Here the superintendent tried his hand with the accused men, but he did not succeed in getting anything out of them.

They denied as stoutly to the chief that they had been guilty of any crime as they had to the detective.

They were consigned to the Tombs, although the superintendent was really reluctant to take the step.

"I do not see the slightest chance of making out a case against any of them," he said to Joe Phenix. "Still, with crooks of this kind I suppose it is policy for us to wrong them all we can. If we make New York too hot for them they will get out and save us the trouble of keeping our eyes upon them."

The detective agreed with the superintendent that this was the wisest course to pursue.

The bones were submitted to the doctors, and the medical men agreed that they were human bones, and furthermore expressed the opinion that the man to whom they belonged had recently been alive.

The German tramp too swore that the shreds of cloth looked as if they had formed part of the clothes which Durell, the Ratcatcher had worn.

But although this went far to show that the missing Frenchman had been killed in Papa Perrichon's house, yet it was no evidence as to who had done the deed.

The accused men were represented by the ablest of lawyers, and these gentlemen had little difficulty in convincing the magistrate before whom the case came that there was not evidence strong enough connecting the accused men with the supposed crime to warrant holding them.

And the same result was reached in Dick Delmayne's case.

The judge declared that the prosecution had not shown that the crooks had anything to do with the murder of the Scotchman.

So the prisoners were discharged.

Joe Phenix was not disappointed, for he had expected such an ending to the affair.

For once it appeared as though the wily man-hunter had overshot the mark, and some of the newspapers, eager for a sensation, published some flaming articles in regard to how innocent men were sometimes bounded by detectives.

This was all in the way of business.

The men who wrote the articles did not care a snap about the matter; things were dull and they wanted to put in some attractive matter, so they "pitched into" the bloodhounds, of the law on general principles.

But the detectives knew what they were about.

It was their policy to convince the crooked men of the great city that the eyes of the police were always on them, and that if a man chose to persevere in the path of crime, the slightest false step would be certain to land him in jail.

After the three men were released they held a conference in the Papa Perrichon house, and to this meeting Mrs. Delmayne was invited, for all of the party had the highest opinion of her ability, and in the critical situation which confronted them they believed her advice would be valuable.

The interview was held in the same apartment where Joe Phenix had surprised his prey—the one where the closet was situated, from which the secret passage led to the lower regions.

With the natural dread which crooked men have of doing anything in the broad glare of the day, the meeting was not held until the night was well advanced, and the three, Dick Delmayne, his wife, and the Marquis made their way to the wine-shop with as much caution as though they expected that the police were waiting to pounce upon them, and this in spite of the fact that the men had secured an honorable discharge from the accusation that the indefatigable police spy had made against them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONFERENCE.

PAPA PERRICHON and the Marquis were in the room, engaged in a game of cards to pass the time away, when one of the waiters conducted Dick Delmayne and his wife into the apartment.

"Ah, my dear friends, welcome!" the old Frenchman exclaimed, rising and greeting the visitors with the utmost cordiality. "Mrs. Delmayne, I have not had the pleasure of seeing you for some time, and now you must sit down and make a long evening of it. We will have a bottle of good wine and a game of cards."

"Henri!" he addressed the waiter, a dull-looking French lad. "Bring up a bottle of Burgundy, red seal!"

The boy departed.

It was Papa Perrichon's rule never to allow his servants any grounds to suspect that there was crooked business going on.

When the servant returned with the wine he found the party at the table, apparently enjoying a jolly game of cards.

But after the lad departed, and Papa Perrichon locked the door, the cards were unceremoniously thrown aside.

"Now, my dear friends, we want to carefully consider this matter," the old Frenchman remarked, his face grave and thoughtful.

"It is my impression that we have a very difficult game to play," he continued. "And if we expect to win we must be careful and not make any mistake."

"Yes, yes, the game is a difficult one; no doubt about it!" the Marquis declared.

"If we make any false moves we are done for," Dick Delmayne observed. "For by an unfortunate chain of accidents this bloodhound, Joe Phenix, has got an inkling of what is going on, and he is one of the kind of men who when they strike a trail are certain to follow it until the game is captured."

"I am not an alarmist," Mrs. Delmayne remarked, "but I regard this man, Phenix, as being more dangerous than all the rest of the detectives put together, for he is such a bull-dog that he never knows when he is beaten."

"That is true!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "Other men after springing a trap of this kind, would be pretty certain to get disgusted when they found out that the prey had contrived to wriggle out without any trouble, but such an occurrence only seems to increase the efforts of Phenix. He does not become dismayed but goes in stronger than ever."

"Oh, yes, that is the reputation of the man; he is a devil!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"We were shadowed here to night," Mrs. Delmayne remarked. "Dick had an idea that a watch would be placed upon us and so we doubled on our track by using the Elevated Road, thereby putting up a job on the shadow. We succeeded in eluding his vigilance, but the chances are ten to one that this house is watched when we enter."

"I was also shadowed to-night," the Marquis said. "But I came straight along, just as if I hadn't any suspicions of the fact."

"Ah, my children, it is not of much use for you to attempt to get away from these shadows!" the old Frenchman declared with a wise shake of the head.

"That is, I mean if you are coming here, for you are right in supposing that the house is watched."

"I expected that something of the kind would be worked, you know, and so I have kept my eyes open; I am no fool when it comes to busi-

ness of that sort, and I believe there are at least a half-a-dozen shadows engaged in the game!"

The others looked surprised at this declaration. "I am not at all exaggerating the matter, my children!" the old Frenchman exclaimed. "The shadows have been in the saloon and in the neighborhood all day long. And not content with this method of working the game, spies have taken possession of an apartment on the other side of the street and there, from behind a closed blind, they are keeping a watch."

"I am no chicken, my children," the old man continued. "And I had an idea that some game of the sort would be tried so I was on the alert to detect it."

"It seems to me that this Phenix is rather overdoing the thing," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"Yes, the great trick with the shadow act is not to let the game be perceived," the Marquis observed. "Or, at all events, that is the way I should argue. If the shadows act in such a way that their business is suspected by the men whom they are watching their usefulness is gone."

"Ah, my dear Marquis, you are not up to this Joe Phenix's game yet!" Papa Perrichon declared.

"He is very deep, is this detective—a perfect demon of a man, and as full of cunning as an egg is of meat," the old Frenchman continued.

"But for all of his marvelous shrewdness I think I understand his game."

"The spies are all around my place! they come and go so openly, that unless I am the most unsuspecting of men I must see them."

"I notice them, and I, Papa Perrichon, say to myself, 'Aha! I am watched, I must be careful!'"

"For two or three days this keeps on, and then the spies disappear. The detective shrewdly reckons that I will now say to myself: 'Oho! the shadows could not find anything suspicious and so they have given it up as a bad job.'"

"The cunning Joe Phenix thinks that then I will be off my guard and will not suspect that the house is watched by spies opposite, and, probably, also by spies located in houses on both sides of me."

"Ah, Papa Perrichon, you have a long head!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed.

"I was not born yesterday!" the old Frenchman declared.

"There is little doubt that you have guessed the game that Joe Phenix intends to play," the woman declared.

"It is very probable," Dick Delmayne remarked. "But, I say, what are we going to do about the matter?" And he put the question in an earnest, thoughtful way.

"Just so long as Joe Phenix keeps up this sort of business it will not be safe for us to make a move."

"Decidedly not!" Papa Perrichon exclaimed. "If we did, this man-hunter would be sure to be on our track."

"And that is something that we must avoid at all hazards!" Mr. Delmayne exclaimed.

"Yes, we escaped from his clutches once and we would be foolish to risk being caught again," the Marquis declared.

The French crook had conceived the highest respect for the acute detective's abilities.

"And yet this is a game where it is not safe to wait," Mr. Delmayne observed, musingly.

"Why not?" Papa Perrichon demanded. "Will it not keep?"

"Hardly," Mrs. Delmayne replied. "There is the danger that somebody else may find the hiding place of the treasure."

"These western miners—the class called prospectors, are always on the move in search of gold, and the secret is liable to be discovered at any moment."

"That is true!" Dick Delmayne assented. "The wife knows what she is talking about. She has lived out there, right in the mines, and understands the character of the men who dwell on the frontier."

"Most decidedly, in my opinion, this is one of the cases where delay is dangerous!" the woman declared.

"Yes, yes, I see," he said, slowly. "I understand now, but I did not before. I thought it was one of those cases where there wasn't any need of haste—where the booty would stay until a favorable moment came."

"It might, and then again it might not," Mrs. Delmayne remarked. "I, for one, with the knowledge I possess of the locality, and the men who people it, would advise going for the treasure at the earliest possible moment."

"Yes, but as this Phenix is a regular bull-dog for hanging on, it may be two or three months before he concludes to give this case up as a bad job, and that, under these circumstances, will be a long time to wait!" Papa Perrichon declared, with a grave shake of the head.

"We must not wait!" Mrs. Delmayne replied, in a firm and determined tone.

The Frenchman looked at her in surprise.

"Well, my dear madame, what else can we do?" Papa Perrichon exclaimed, a little perplexed.

"We must make Joe Phenix take his dogs off!" the woman replied.

"How can that be done, my angel?" Papa Perrichon exclaimed.

"By striking at Joe Phenix himself!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed, fiercely.

"He has had his own way too long!" she continued. "He goes about like a very king, and common men slink away from him, but it is about time that some one showed him that he wasn't anything but a human."

"Ah, it will be a difficult matter to get at such a fellow as Joe Phenix," the old Frenchman observed, with a dubious shake of the head.

"It can be done!" Mrs. Delmayne declared.

"A trap can be set into which he can be induced to walk, and then, when he is in, he must be threatened with death if he does not agree to keep his hands off us in the future."

The old Frenchman shook his head. It was plain that he had not much faith in the scheme.

"Ay, maybe you will be able to do it, but I think you will find it very hard to put salt on the tail of such a bird as Joe Phenix!" he declared.

"I will think of some scheme, and when I get it arranged to my satisfaction, I will let you know," Mrs. Delmayne remarked.

"At any rate we cannot do anything so long as the man is after us in this persistent fashion," Papa Perrichon declared.

"No, it would be folly to attempt to make any move," Dick Delmayne observed. "For Phenix would be sure to catch us."

"Yes, we cannot do anything until he gives up the chase," said the Marquis, who had a great fear of the detective.

And so the conference ended, without the parties coming to any decisive agreement.

Dread of the acute, argus-eyed detective, hung like a pall over all of them, and they dared not make a move for fear of falling into his hands.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WOMAN'S SCHEME.

A WEEK passed away, and the Hotel de France was still closely shadowed, much to the disgust of Papa Perrichon, and then, to his delight, the spies suddenly disappeared.

At first the old Frenchman was suspicious. He believed that the shadows had been withdrawn in order to throw him off his guard, and he fancied that the old men would be replaced by new ones.

But no suspicious personages made their appearance, and the spies across the street also disappeared.

"He has concluded that he is wasting time, and has given the affair up," Papa Perrichon observed to the Marquis, who happened to drop into the wine-shop on the day after the host had noticed the disappearance of the shadows.

The Marquis shook his head.

"I hope so," he remarked. "But I have such a fear of this devil of a detective that I should be more inclined to think he has withdrawn his men to lull us into a false sense of security than because he does not think he can succeed in trapping us."

When the Delmaynes came—Papa Perrichon sent them a message as soon as he became satisfied that the house was no longer watched—they too were inclined to believe that the detective had not given up the chase.

But Mrs. Delmayne had hit upon a plan to baffle the relentless Joe Phenix.

"I should like to strike a blow at this bloodhound which would prevent him from ever troubling anybody else," she said. "But it is the old story of the rats putting a bell on the cat. I can't contrive a plan by means of which it can be safely accomplished."

"Oh, no, it is not an easy matter—far from it," the old Frenchman remarked.

"Well, the scheme I have hit upon I think is a good one," the woman declared. "My husband has related to me all the particulars concerning the document found in the copper casket, and recited to me, as nearly as he could remember, the contents of the paper. But as to the description of the place where the treasure is concealed, he could not give me that, for he does not know the particulars himself."

The Frenchmen nodded; they remembered that when the document was read to the Delmaynes, these particulars were omitted.

"I happen to write a large, masculine-looking hand, so I have drawn out another paper, as nearly like the original as I could remember, but put in my own directions as to the hiding-place of the treasure."

"Now, my game is to send for Joe Phenix to meet me here, and pretend to him that I am willing to peach on the rest of you."

"I will pretend that I stumbled upon the hiding-place of this document, which was all that was in the copper casket, and in return for his protection, and a fair reward after the treasure is discovered, I will give it to him."

"Yes, but will he not suspect that there is some trick in this?" Papa Perrichon asked.

"I don't see how he will be likely to suspect that there is anything wrong," Mrs. Delmayne replied.

"My idea in peaching is that neither my husband nor myself stand any chance to make anything out of the matter, as you and your partner, having been the ones to get hold of the copper box, claim the right to take the lion's share of the money."

"The scheme is not a bad one," Papa Perrichon remarked in a reflective way.

"I have located the hidden treasure at a point some thirty miles south of this mining-town known as Crazy Camp; of course giving a description entirely made up, and when he gets on the ground he will not be able to find anything like it."

"Send him on a wild goose chase eh?" exclaimed the old Frenchman, rubbing his hands together and grinning with sardonic glee.

"Yes, and the moment he is out of New York we can make our preparations and start for the scene of action. Our game, you know, will be to keep out of the way until the detective gets disgusted with hunting for a place that he cannot find and starts to return to New York, then we can proceed to get at the valuables."

"It strikes me that this is a pretty good scheme," Dick Delmayne observed.

"Yes, if the detective bites at the bait, it will certainly throw him off the track," the old Frenchman assented.

"I do not see any reason why he should suspect there is any trick in the affair," the Marquis declared.

"Another point to be considered too," Mrs. Delmayne remarked. "Joe Phenix in the wilds of Arizona does not possess the power that he wields here in New York City."

"In the wild mining districts of the West each man is a law unto himself and a detective is no better than any other man, so if by any accident we should happen to come in contact with Joe Phenix we stand some show for our lives."

"Ah, yes, my dear, but if you will take my advice you will keep out of his way if you possibly can!" Papa Perrichon exclaimed.

"Yes, that is my opinion, too," the Marquis hastened to observe. "He is a dangerous man, no matter where you meet him."

"I should not be afraid to measure either wits or strength with him outside of the big cities where he has the police at his back!" Dick Delmayne declared, in an arrogant way.

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Delmayne, all I desire in regard to this demon of a detective is to keep as far away from him as possible!" the old Frenchman exclaimed.

"Now, in order to make this tale as probable as possible, this false document of mine"—and at this point Mrs. Delmayne produced it—"ought to be hidden away somewhere, so I could pretend that I wormed the secret out of my husband, and that you, Papa Perrichon, were not aware that I knew of its hiding-place."

"No trouble about that," the old Frenchman replied. "I have a little cubby-hole where I hide things once in a while when the police get too inquisitive."

Then Papa Perrichon showed Mrs. Delmayne a nail head in the wall, a trifling thing which looked as though it had been driven in to hold the woodwork together, but when a thumb nail was pressed under it, and the nail head pushed upward, a little door swung open revealing a tiny closet about six inches square and a foot deep.

"That is just the place!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed.

Then the false paper was put in the secret closet and the door closed.

"Aha!" cried Papa Perrichon, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "Now we are ready for Monsieur Joe Phenix."

"But stay a moment, how will you notify the detective?"

"Send him a note by a messenger, tell him that I want to see him on important business, and have made arrangements to meet him here in this room; request him to come disguised so that no one will suspect who he is."

"But will he not be apt to think that it is a trap and be afraid to come?" the old Frenchman asked.

"Oh, no, Joe Phenix is not that kind of a man," Mrs. Delmayne replied, confidently. "Besides he will make such arrangements that if it is a trap he can make it warm for the ones who got it up."

"That was just the trouble when I was devising some way to trap him," the woman continued. "It was not a difficult matter to arrange a scheme by means of which he could be enticed to a certain place, but the trouble was to get away with him, and then escape the consequences."

"Ah, yes, I see," Papa Perrichon remarked. "I should judge that it would be a difficult matter to arrange that."

"Well, I found it so difficult that I gave it up as a bad job," the woman admitted.

After a few more words the conference came to an end.

Two hours later a messenger boy brought Joe Phenix a letter which considerably surprised the detective.

To be invited to an interview by Slippery Nell was odd, to say the least.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

JOE PHENIX pondered for a considerable while over Mrs. Delmayne's message before he consulted the two detectives, Western and Fitzgerald.

Then, having come to an opinion in regard to the matter, he submitted the affair to his assistants.

"What do you think of it, boys?" Joe Phenix asked after he had read the letter to the two.

"A plant!" Fitzgerald exclaimed.

"Yes, that is what I think," Western coincided.

"Is the woman fool enough to think that she can get me into a trap?" Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"I gave Slippery Nell credit for having more sense!"

"It might be possible that she has some important information to give you, but women like Slippery Nell are not usually the ones to aid the course of justice in any way," Fitzgerald remarked.

"No, not unless they can make a big stake by so doing," Joe Phenix observed.

"But it does not really seem possible, when you come to think the matter over, that Slippery Nell would dare to try any underhand game with a man like yourself," Tony Western remarked.

"Well, no, it would not seem so, but women do strange things sometimes, you know," Joe Phenix replied, thoughtfully.

"If the game is to get me to the Hotel de France, so that a gang can set on me, it is a very stupid movement."

"If the woman knows anything she ought to know that I will come fully-armed, and would be on my guard, prepared for an attack, so would be certain to make it extremely warm for my assailants."

"It does not seem reasonable," Fitzgerald remarked. "I think Mrs. Delmayne is too smart to make any mistake of that kind."

"It may be possible that the woman wants to make some arrangements with you, so that you will let up a little on her husband," Tony Western suggested.

"That may be why she wishes to see me. Anyhow I will go, but I will take precious good care to arrange the matter so that if there is any attack made on me I will be able to convince the men concerned in it that they have made the mistake of their lives."

Joe Phenix made his arrangements in the most careful manner.

Ned Fitzgerald and Tony Western, disguised as Cubans, sauntered into the Hotel de France saloon, apparently strangers to each other, got into conversation over their beer, and then fell to playing cards at one of the tables in the back of the room.

Two more detectives, got up like Frenchmen, came in, and after having a glass of wine at the bar, fell to playing dominoes.

And as far as these four keen-eyed, experienced detectives could see, everything about the place was all right.

There was no unusual crowd—no roughs or desperadoes, only the regular patrons, quiet fellows enough.

At nine o'clock Joe Phenix came in.

He wore his Italian disguise, which so altered his appearance that it is doubtful if his nearest and dearest friend would have recognized him.

It is certain that no one of the four detectives spotted him, not even Tony Western, his right hand man, until Joe Phenix gave the signal of recognition agreed upon, which was simple enough, and one not likely to excite notice.

He asked the bartender if his clock was not fast, and then took out his watch and compared it with the clock, remarking that his timepiece was slow and must be losing time.

This afforded the disguised detectives an excuse to take out their watches, and as each man took his watch out with his left hand and held it up to his left ear, it gave Joe Phenix notice that his men were on hand.

Then the supposed Italian bought a glass of wine, and told the bartender that he had come by appointment to see a party in room No. 10.

"Oh, yes; I was instructed to send monsieur up when he came," the bartender declared, and then, calling the waiter, he instructed him to show the gentleman to the apartment.

In due time Joe Phenix was ushered into the room where Mrs. Delmayne sat reading by the table.

The lady rose and greeted her visitor when the lad returned, a look of surprise upon her face.

"It cannot be possible that this is Mr. Phenix!" she exclaimed.

"The same, and at your service," the detective replied.

"In deed, your disguise is marvelous!"

"Unless a disguise is perfect it is not worth while for a man to assume it."

"That is true, but I did not believe that it would be possible for any one to so completely transform themselves. I never would have known you, and yet I have always prided myself upon the sharpness of my eyes."

"I was somewhat surprised at your note, but

as I thought from the tone of it that you meant business, I came as you requested."

"Oh, yes, I mean business; your can depend upon that!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "And as I know that you are a busy man, with no time to waste, I will proceed to explain at once. Pray be seated."

Joe Phenix bowed and took a chair.

"Now, Mr. Phenix, although I have never been unfortunate enough to come in contact with you in a professional way until this time, yet you are well known to me by reputation, of course," the confidence woman began.

The detective nodded.

In all cases of this kind he always allowed the party making the explanation to go ahead, without interference on his part.

"I have always heard you spoken of as a man who could be relied upon to keep any agreement that he might make."

The detective bowed.

"That while you were inflexible in hunting down the party upon whose track you got, yet if any unfortunate was wise enough to trust to your mercy, you were always willing to do the square thing by them."

"Well, as far as my remembrance goes, I do not recall to mind any one who complained of the treatment they received from me; that is, if they lived up to the agreement, and did not attempt to play sharp with me," the detective remarked.

"Oh, I understand that, of course!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "Any one who would attempt to measure wits with a man like yourself must have a good opinion of their own capabilities, and a party who would attempt to play a game upon you after coming to a friendly arrangement deserves to be severely punished."

"They console their conscience with the assurance that it is all right to get ahead of a man in my line of business," the detective observed.

"Well, each one is the best judge of their own affairs naturally, but I don't think that it is wise to try a game of that kind," the woman declared.

"Now, Mr. Phenix, I have sent for you to talk business, and, right in the beginning, I want you to understand that I am going to be as square with you as a die."

"I am glad of that, and if you hold to a course of that kind I am sure that we will not have any difficulty in getting along."

"You had a long chase after the copper casket, but you succeeded in getting it at last," the woman observed, abruptly.

"Yes, but as there wasn't anything in the casket when I did get it I must admit that I did not succeed in accomplishing much," Joe Phenix replied.

"All that the casket contained was a single document, a letter addressed by a man named James Grahame, who lived at a place called Crazy Camp in Arizona to his daughter here in New York."

"Yes, I imagined something of the kind was in the box."

"The box was found in the sewer, where Sharp flung it to hide the casket from you, by these Frenchmen, and as they didn't know exactly how to handle the affair, Papa Perrichon called in my husband, not having any suspicion, you know, that he knew aught of the matter."

Joe Phenix nodded.

This did not strike him as being at all improbable, for it fully explained how it was that he and the Frenchmen came to be pals.

"My husband told me all the particulars of the bargain that he has made with the Frenchmen and I don't like the arrangement."

"The paper contains instructions how to find a valuable treasure, which James Grahame hid away in the mountains, near this mining-town, and the secret of a wonderful gold mine."

"These Frenchmen having possession of the paper have made such a bargain with Dick that he doesn't stand any show at all compared with what they will get, although he will have to do the most of the work, and I am just ugly enough to want to go in and bust up the whole thing."

"The document is concealed in this room; I got that of Dick, and now if you are willing to do the fair thing I will put it into your hands."

Hardly had the words left her lips when there was a terrific explosion and the house rocked as though it had been shaken by an earthquake.

Both were on their feet at once.

"My heavens! what was that?" cried Mrs. Delmayne, white with terror.

"Some accident has happened!" exclaimed Joe Phenix hurrying to the door.

But the force of the explosion had shattered the wall in such a way that it was a good five minutes before the detective could get the door open, and then a great volume of smoke came pouring in, and the horrified pair saw that all the lower part of the house was in flames.

Up the stairs the flames were roaring, cutting off all escape.

"Oh, merciful heavens we are lost!" the woman cried, almost frantic.

Joe Phenix did not lose his presence of mind but shut the door as soon as possible.

"There is a second passage from the closet here leading into the sewer, and if it has not

been wrecked by the explosion we can escape!" he exclaimed.

The detective had both a dark lantern and a jimmy in his pocket, so he was provided with the necessary tools.

As it happened, the secret passage bars, had not been disturbed by the explosion, and the pair managed to make their way to the sewer, thus escaping from the awful trap in which they had been caught.

CHAPTER XXX. IN THE SEWER.

THE underground passage was so dark that it was not possible for the fugitives to see a yard before them.

"We have escaped from one trap only to fall into another!" exclaimed Mrs. Delmayne in a voice which trembled with agitation.

"Oh, no, it is not so bad as all that," the detective replied.

"It may take us some little time to get out but there isn't any danger but what we will be able to do it."

"I hope so, for I am not fit to die," Mrs. Delmayne responded, evidently very much affected.

"Come, come, this will not do!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "You are surely not going to show the white feather—you, the woman who for years have demonstrated that you possess as much courage as any crook that ever braved the power of the police?"

"Yes, it is true, I have been a dare-devil!" she replied.

"Not a doubt about that!"

"But now I am weakening."

"Yes?"

"It is true—I am horribly afraid!"

"Well, I am astonished!"

"It is strange, is it not?"

"So strange that if any one but yourself had told me, I would not have been willing to credit it," the detective replied.

"I am a woman and like all my sex inclined to be superstitious," Mrs. Delmayne explained.

"I see, and this affair has made an impression upon you."

"It has, and one I am not sure which I will be likely to forget in a hurry," Mrs. Delmayne declared, and from the way in which she spoke it was plain that she meant what she said.

"A pretty close call as a sporting man would say."

"And we are not out of the scrape yet," and again the woman's voice was tremulous.

The noise made by the people in the street, the roll of the engines, and the roaring of the flames as the fire devoured the doomed house, could be heard by the pair, but all the sounds came in a strangely muffled way.

"Oh, we are all right now!" Joe Phenix declared.

"I hope that is the truth, for I am afraid of death when it comes in such a shape as this," the woman declared in a tone which the bloodhound had never heard her use before.

"We may be condemned to pass an hour or so in this place, for they are kicking up such a row in the street that I don't believe we could manage to attract anybody's attention, but that is all there is to the matter."

"I am pretty well posted in regard to this particular sewer, you know," the detective continued. "For it was in this underground passage that I discovered the bones of the unfortunate Frenchman, known as the Ratscatcher."

"Yes, yes, I remember; poor wretch!" and Slippery Nell shivered as she spoke.

"There isn't any doubt in my mind that he was murdered by this old French scoundrel, or some of his gang, although I was not able to prove it."

"From what I know of the man I do not think he would hesitate to commit such a crime if he could make a good stake by so doing, and the chance was good that the crime would not be brought home to him," Mrs. Delmayne admitted.

"We had better make our way to the man-hole at the corner," the detective said. "And then we will be in readiness to attract the attention of some one after this row subsides."

"I have never been in such a place as this in all my life," the woman remarked. "Can we go on without any trouble?"

"Oh, yes; it isn't quite as good walking as can be found on Broadway, but we can manage to get along all right."

"I am almost afraid to move!" Mrs. Delmayne declared.

"Don't be alarmed! There's no danger! Give me your hand and come along! I will take care of you now even if I have to snap the bracelets on you in the near future," Joe Phenix said in a joking way, which was something rare for him as he seldom indulged in a jest.

"You are a good fellow, Phenix, even if you are a bloodhound and hunt us poor wretches down without mercy!" the woman exclaimed, impulsively.

"Oh, that is all in the way of business," the detective explained.

"I can assure you that I bear no malice," he continued. "And even when a man becomes desperate, and strikes at my life, I don't bear him any grudge after the affair is over."

"Of course, I always defend myself to the best of my ability, and I think I may say without boasting that, as a rule, I generally manage to give as good as I get."

"Oh, yes, that is true enough!" Mrs. Delmayne declared. "Any one who is familiar with your career will freely admit that."

"But it is all a mere matter of business, and no matter how hard I push a man, I am always ready to let up on him the moment I see that he manifests a disposition to do the right thing."

"That is your reputation. I know," the woman observed, thoughtfully.

"I have always done my best to live up to a reputation of that kind, and, as I said, after I get my game I bear no malice even if I have been put to a lot of trouble."

"You are a gentleman, Joe Phenix, and an honest man!" Mrs. Delmayne cried, impulsively. "And if all the man-hunters were like you there would be less crime in the world!"

"Well, that may be true," the detective admitted.

"I am certain that it is so!" the woman asserted. "You are as untiring on the trail of an evil-doer as the bloodhound whom you so much resemble, but after the victim is hunted down, you are always ready to do all you can for the poor wretch."

"I represent the law, and although the law punishes it does not persecute."

"True—very true!"

"But give me your hand, and let us get to the man-hole as soon as possible," Joe Phenix observed.

Then the pair groped in the dark until their hands touched, and the detective as he took the small and shapely hand of the woman in his own broad palm noticed that it trembled.

"Come, come! this will not do!" he exclaimed. "Never say die, you know!"

"It is of no use for me to attempt to disguise the truth," she replied. "I am horribly frightened."

"Oh, you are worth a dozen dead women!" Joe Phenix declared. "Pluck up your courage and come on!"

"You will think it strange, I suppose, but I am afraid in the dark, and always have been since I was a child."

"That is rather odd."

"Yes, but it is the truth. I have performed some daring exploits in my time, but if you are acquainted with the particulars—and I know you must be with some of them—you will see, when you recall the past, that all my adventures have taken place in the broad daylight. I have never done any night work."

"Well, now that you speak of it, I remember that it is so."

"Many a time has there been an opportunity for me by a bold stroke to secure a good stake, but on account of the game having to be played in the darkness, I have never dared to go into it, for I feared to trust myself to do good work after nightfall."

"This is really extremely odd."

"Yes, the inky pall of the night seems to sap my courage, and I become as weak and irresolute as a child, while in the daylight I do not know the meaning of the word fear!"

"It takes all sorts of people to make a world," the detective observed, with the air of a philosopher. "I have encountered too many strange characters in my time to wonder now at any that I may meet."

"As far as I am concerned light and darkness are the same to me—that is, I mean, in regard to their affecting my spirits."

"In fact, some of the best work I have ever done has been after nightfall, and I think if I came to figure the thing up, the result would show that my good pieces of night work outnumber the day two to one at least."

"It is very different in my case; I have never attempted to do any night work at all," Mrs. Delmayne replied. "I felt sure that I could not trust myself, and so I never dared to risk it."

"You were wise," the detective observed. "In my opinion any one is foolish to go into an enterprise when they have serious doubts in regard to their ability to make a success out of it."

"Yes, I think so, too, and on that rule I have acted."

"Come along! don't be afraid! It will be rather slippery walking, but if you are careful how you step you can keep on your feet, all right."

"Oh, I do not doubt that I will get along," the woman replied.

And then the two started.

As the detective had said, the path was a slippery one, but by proceeding cautiously they reached the man-hole at the corner without difficulty, but here the real trouble began.

There was so much noise and confusion in the street above that it was impossible for the detective to make any one hear him, although he even went so far as to discharge his revolver.

"Oh, it is no use!" he exclaimed, at last, in a disgusted tone. "As long as this racket in the street keeps up we shall be obliged to remain here."

"Well, it cannot last very long, that is one

consolation," Mrs. Delmayne remarked. "We are not in any danger now, although it is horridly disagreeable to be obliged to remain here, but are you quite sure that after the noise stops we will be able to make anybody understand that we are down here, so that we can be rescued?"

It was evident from this speech that the woman still doubted.

"Yes, yes, when the noise ceases, and I fire my revolver near the opening into the street some one will be sure to hear it, and as their astonishment will be excited by the circumstance, you can depend upon it that they will not fail to look into the matter. We will be rescued quickly enough as soon as the street quiets down."

CHAPTER XXXI.
A CONFESSION.

THERE was silence for a good five minutes after the detective finished his speech, for Mrs. Delmayne was absorbed in reflection, then she spoke in an abrupt way.

"Mr. Phenix, during the last few minutes I have been thinking about my past life."

"Is that so?" responded the detective, rather at a loss to understand what the woman was driving at.

"Yes, and I am beginning to believe that I have made some very great mistakes," she continued.

"Well, as far as that goes, I do not believe there are many in this world who would not have to make the same confession, if they were honest enough to speak the truth about the matter."

"I suppose that is a fact; but I was not thinking of any one but myself," Mrs. Delmayne observed, in a thoughtful way.

"The events of the last hour have given rise to thoughts that never before came to me."

"We did have a rather narrow squeeze for it," the detective responded.

"Yes, yes, our peril was great."

"And if it had not been for the fact that the secret of the passage leading from that room down into the sewer was known to me, the chances are a thousand to one that we would have perished in that apartment, for excepting by the secret passage there was not an avenue of escape open to us."

"The sudden bursting out of the flames seems to me to be a most mysterious thing," Mrs. Delmayne observed.

"Yes, I don't think I ever saw a fire gain so great a headway in so little time."

"What do you suppose caused it?"

"Well, I can only guess at the matter, of course, for I haven't much of anything to go on," the detective replied.

"The first thing was an explosion, which seemed as though it had been caused by gunpowder, and I will be honest with you, and say that when the sound of the explosion fell upon my ears, my first idea was that you had lured me into a trap; but then when I discovered the flames, and saw that the house was on fire, and in such a way that it appeared as if we were penned in like a couple of rats in a trap, I came to the opinion that I must be wrong in my conclusion, for you would hardly be willing to throw away your own life, even for the pleasure of destroying mine."

"Oh, yes, you are right!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed. "I had no intention of striking a blow at you, and the fire was as great a surprise and shock to me as it could possibly be to you."

"So I judged at the time. The old Frenchman hated me, and I have no doubt he would give a good deal to have me put out of the way, but I don't think he would go quite to the length of burning up his house to get rid of me."

"Oh, no, he certainly would not do that!" the woman exclaimed.

"The only solution to the problem, as far as I can see, is that the explosion was an accidental one," Joe Phenix observed, musingly.

"Possibly the gas was out of order, or something of that sort. I have heard of some cases of the kind."

"Yes, so have I."

"The rapidity with which the flames spread would suggest that the fire was due to something of the kind."

"Very true," the woman responded, slowly, and from the way in which she spoke, it was evident that her thoughts were far away.

"Mr. Phenix, I am going to make a confession to you!" Mrs. Delmayne exclaimed, abruptly.

"I am glad to hear it, for I have no doubt you can give me some useful information, if you will."

"You were right in suspecting that when I invited you to meet me at the Frenchman's house that I was luring you into a trap."

"That was my idea; I know you of old, Mrs. Delmayne, and I did not believe that you were honest when you pretended you wanted to square the matter with me, although I will do you the justice of saying that you talked in such a way that I was not able to guess what you were up to, but I suppose the explosion interrupted your little game before you had a chance to develop it."

"Well, it cannot last very long, that is one

"No, you saw all that there was to the plot; I had no idea of attempting to do you any damage," she explained.

"In fact, I did not dare to try to play any game of the kind, for I felt certain it would not succeed."

"You see, Mr. Phenix, I have too high an opinion of your abilities as a warrior to attempt to have you 'done up,' for I felt positive you would get the best of the fight."

"Well, I don't like to boast—it is not my way, but it is a fact that I have always succeeded in holding my own, and I have met the best men in the crooked fraternity too."

"The game that I was trying to work was an extremely simple one," Mrs. Delmayne explained.

"I offered to surrender to you the paper which had been in the copper cylinder provided you would agree to let up in your pursuit of my husband and myself."

"Yes, that is what you proposed."

"And where the trick was to come in was that the paper which I should have given you was not the right one."

"Well, when I accepted your offer I had a suspicion that you might play some trick of the kind, but I believed that when I came to read the document I would be able to tell whether it was the genuine paper or not."

"I may be flattering myself too much, but I do not believe that you could have detected the cheat, for I prepared the paper with exceeding care."

"The idea was, you see, to throw you off on a false scent, to send you to a point to get the treasure miles away from the real location, and then, while you were occupied in this wild goose chase, my husband and his confederates would be able to get the money."

"A very clever device indeed," the detective said in a musing way.

"And it is possible too that you could have succeeded in working the game but for the accident of the explosion."

"Well, the chance is gone now, and as far as I am concerned, I can assure you that I will not take any further steps in the matter," the woman asserted.

"I think you are acting wisely in coming to this conclusion."

"You see I am beginning to be a convert to the belief that this copper casket brings ill-luck to every one who has anything to do with it."

"Getting to be a little superstitious, eh?" the detective questioned.

"Yes, I am, and no mistake! although I will say that I am not much given to that sort of thing, but in this case it really looks as if there was something in it."

"The copper casket has surely brought death to three men since it arrived in New York," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Or perhaps I am putting it too strongly to say that, and I will qualify my words by stating that three men who had the copper casket in their possession came to untimely ends."

"There is no disputing that fact, and if it doesn't prove that the copper casket brings bad luck with it then I am not competent to pass an opinion on the matter."

"Well, the copper box is now where it cannot do any harm, for it is safe among the curiosities at Police Headquarters."

"Possibly though it was the paper in the box, rather than the box itself, which did the mischief—assuming, you know, that there is some truth in the notion."

"Well, if the firemen do not succeed in saving the Frenchman's house I think the chances are great that no one will ever see the document again, for it was in the Frenchman's possession, and as he would not be apt to carry it around with him, the probabilities are that he has it concealed in some secure hiding-place, and if that is so it cannot escape destruction," Mrs. Delmayne observed.

"You are right I think, and with the destruction of the paper comes the withdrawal of you and your husband from the affair?" the detective questioned.

"You are correct as far as I am concerned, I am through!" Mrs. Delmayne declared, in the most decided way.

"And your husband?"

"I cannot answer for him," she replied. "He believes that there is a fortune in this matter, and I should not be surprised if he goes West on purpose to make the attempt to get it."

"He has confederates there, you know, the men who first got him interested in this matter, for, of course, he had no knowledge of the affair until a messenger from his old pals in the West arrived and roped him into the game."

"I understand."

"But, as I said, I am done!" and the woman spoke with the accents of truth.

"Not only through with this case, Mr. Phenix, but through with a crooked life," she continued.

"I have had a terrible warning to-night, and I am just superstitious enough to accept it as an omen that I am in the wrong road and had better get out of it."

"You are wise, and I am glad to know that you have made such a decision!" the detective declared.

"You are a capable woman and can easily get a living without having to lead a crooked life."

"Yes, that is true, and then I have been a prudent, saving woman, and have enough money put by to start in some business by which I can support myself."

"What will your husband say?" Joe Phenix queried.

"Well, I don't suppose he will like it, but he can't help himself," she replied.

"There is no turning him from a crooked life, you know," Mrs. Delmayne continued. "A crook he is, and a crook he will continue to be until the end."

"I am sorry for it; he should take example by you."

"Oh, no, he will have his own way!"

"I'll try my revolver again," the detective observed. "Perhaps I may be more successful this time than before."

Joe Phenix was right in his conjecture; attention was attracted, and soon the two were rescued from their underground abode.

To his rescuers the detective explained how he and his companion had escaped from the burning house.

Then the two stood in the street and watched the destruction of the Hotel de France, which soon became a total ruin, as it burned like so much tinder, in spite of the efforts of the steam fire engines to control the flames.

"Well, that is good-by to the secret of the copper-box," Mrs. Delmayne said in the ear of the detective. "The paper is in ashes now, and the treasure is likely to stay in its hiding-place unless some one is lucky enough to stumble upon it by accident. And how strange it is too; there was a superstition that the copper box carried ill-luck with it!"

It certainly seemed as though it did, for Papa Perrichon and the Marquis both perished in the flames.

They were attending the meeting of a red-flag club, whose members had vowed to destroy all tyrants, in a room on the first floor, and one of the chemists of the club was showing the rest a chemical compound which he had constructed for the especial benefit of kings, millionaires, police and such "vermin."

The compound had exploded and brought death and destruction in its train.

Our tale is told.

Like a bloodhound Joe Phenix had stuck to his quest, but both the false and true documents perished in the flames.

In Arizona though the treasure still remains, and of the detective's adventures in search of it we will tell the tale anon.

THE END.

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